

THE HOLY CLUB  
WHAT ITS MEMBERS  
DID WHILE WAITING FOR GOD

A THESIS  
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ROSS W. GENDER

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To my wife

June LeLeux Genger

A Cajun and a Christian

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I had been ministering in two denominations for fifteen years following a Masters of Divinity. My desire and push had always been evangelical with a love of the Bible and prayerful study, but I have always been disappointed in the politics of denominations and lack of Christian fellowship. The results of my ministry at the churches I served have been mediocre though I greatly desire revival and always have the expectation of the move of God. Through an advertisement in *Christianity Today*, I noticed that Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary was providing the opportunity to take a D. Min. entitled “Revival and Reform: Renewing the Congregational Life.” I applied with the hope of understanding the statistical loss of members across the United States and finding a remedy. There I have been able to meld my admiration of John Wesley into a project that has enhanced my knowledge, love of God, desire of revival, and the methods used by others of the church. The attempt has been to limit the work to a description of ways of the Holy Club, but there are many entanglements of cause and effect. I have been implementing the information and dedication to God in the local church with good results. Further application is currently in the planning. There has been reassurance of that which I have always sought and the rejection by my denomination which encourages me that I am on the right track. I wish to acknowledge my grateful appreciation of the dedicated teaching, holy kindness, and mercy of Professors Garth Rosell and Bob Mayer. Without their love of the Lord and care of stumbling seekers, I would not have grown to the place I am today; a little wiser, a little sadder, and more determined and dedicated to the propagation of the saving grace of the only Lord Jesus, who is the Christ of all from God.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work was to consider and apply what the Holy Club of John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and others did that affected their lives to the degree that transformed them into the people available and approved by God for the revival that went throughout the British Isles and the American colonies starting in the eighteenth century. The application of their method and attitude was particularly sought after. Initially the work mentions the background of some of the members and of early eighteenth century England. The call of God on each is observed along with a historical development of the Holy Club and a focus on their means of growth and specific development of their fellowship. The means of grace that was instituted by the Church of England, scripture, and the Lord Jesus (as John Wesley saw it) was a rallying area for the works of these seeking a synergistic understanding of salvation. Through journals, sermons, auto-biographies, biographies, and books it is demonstrated that the Holy Club emphasized humility, seeking God and holiness, biblical and focused studies, prayer and belief, communion and testifying, self-denial, and charitable giving.

## INTRODUCTION

Revival or reformation is not peaceful however it is conducted.<sup>1</sup> Revival is a call to primitive Christianity and pure faith in Christ. This is a change from the intellectual or traditional conditions of the day, and therefore draws resistance from many sources for a variety of reasons. “The Great Awakening” of the 1740s was rooted in the Methodist revival that swept the British Isles and colonial America. It seems appropriate to find the source of this revival as it may lead us to our own revival. One of the major sources of this revival was the work of several men from the Holy Club at Lincoln College, Oxford, England. This name, “Holy Club,” and that of “Methodists,” was derisively given to the group of earnest divinity students meeting for spiritual exercises and service to others. Reading this extensive material about the Holy Club from various diaries, journals, autobiographies, and biographies revealed a fundamental concept that could impact the thinking of our own era.<sup>2</sup> These men and women were not seeking revival. They were seeking God and how to serve Him.

Reformation is defined, for the purpose of this work, as the act of reforming or attempting to be changed to the standards of God rather than humanity. Reform is the work people do to become obedient to God’s standards and to God. This occurs perhaps before revival but always after revival.<sup>3</sup> Revival will be defined as God’s work in our

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 18. Noll defines revivals as “intense periods of unusual response to gospel preaching linked with unusual efforts at godly living.”

<sup>2</sup> St. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God* (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1951), 5ff. C.S. Lewis in the preface says ancient authors do not have the same errors as your own and therefore the mistaken views are easier to identify than contemporary writings. Thereby, you profit from historical study.

<sup>3</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 27-28. Wesley accuses the Moravians of mysticism in waiting on God for salvation without seeking Him by all means possible.

hearts and consciousness. John Wesley describes salvation as “a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”<sup>4</sup> This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley asserts that until a person receives the Holy Ghost, that person is without God in the world; that he cannot know the things of God, unless God reveals them unto him by the inspiration of the Holy One.<sup>5</sup> Thus salvation is the normal but initial working of the Holy Spirit within a person through faith in Jesus, which we also call revival.

John and Charles Wesley were two of the nineteen children born to Susanna and Samuel Wesley.<sup>6</sup> Susanna taught the children and cared for the parsonage. The Book of Common Prayer, its Homilies, and the love of the English Bible became part of the fabric of life for the Wesley children.<sup>7</sup> These children came to appreciate the Catholic tradition and the Protestant affirmations which were blended in the religious inheritance of the Church of England.<sup>8</sup> Much change had occurred prior to the time of John Wesley and affected the course of the church while providing the plowed ground for the sowing of the Wesleyan interpretation of the gospel combined with good works.<sup>9</sup> Though this work will be limited to the guidance of and by the two Wesley brothers and Whitefield, there were others who greatly enhanced and also guided the group. The presence of others gave much force and insight into the Holy Club’s ways and strategy to serve God and people. These three could not be the only factor in a group. In the beginning of the Christian era,

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<sup>4</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 8, 47.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 8, 106.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Henry Carter, *The Methodist Heritage* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> David L. Edwards, *Christian England: Its Story to the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983). Edwards provides this background information.

God “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> It was the same in the continuing work of God through the Holy Club. Members were all studious, devout, self-denying, and charitable. Every morning and evening they spent an hour in private prayer, throughout the day reminded themselves and God of their need for humility, faith, hope, love, and lived lives of exemplary moral conduct.<sup>11</sup> They received communion once a week together and encouraged everyone they could to attend public prayers, sermons, and receive sacraments.<sup>12</sup> They served all the poor and imprisoned they could and fasted every Wednesday and Friday until tea at three o’clock. In short, these members were sincere inquirers of the faith and founded their study in the Bible.

The first of the Holy Club were the Wesleys, Robert Kirkham, and William Morgan.<sup>13</sup> These four gathered to read the Greek New Testament and attend weekly sacrament. Kirkham was transformed by this association and thereby exemplified one of their purposes of meeting: helping each other to save their own soul.<sup>14</sup> Morgan guided the Holy Club toward service of all they could reach and was the first to die.<sup>15</sup> There were never more than twenty-five in the Holy Club and their stories are revealed in Tyerman’s work.<sup>16</sup> Even in this group of closely monitored seekers there was a representative of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12, KJV.

<sup>11</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (Stoke-on Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2003), iv. This is a reprint of the book originally printed in 1873 and gives the material available at that time concerning several of these young men. They were varied in character but united in earnest service of the God they knew was there. This work is of great interest and demonstrates the backgrounds and seeking of these who were earnest and diligent in service to God.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., v-vi.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> *The Oxford Methodists*.

world. Westley Hall, a member of respect and in apparent love of God, fell far in theology and practice.<sup>17</sup> He turned to the practice and preaching of polygamy and only repented much near his demise, which John Wesley earnestly desired was true.<sup>18</sup> Even in Hall's apostasy, the communication and guidance from others toward biblical holiness continued as much as possible. Thus the Holy Club had a diverse group of members: high-churchmen, people of earnest piety, evangelists, prophets to guide the church, Bible translators, distributors of Bibles and religious literature, educators, spiritually minded Christians, and one rascal.<sup>19</sup>

The Holy Club consisted of "normal" people who were transformed to become used of God throughout the British Isles and the colonies. The members apparently found salvation through the grace of Christ during their activities and fellowship in this organized group. What is proposed in the following chapters is to detail their activity and demonstrate what influenced them as they were transformed. Will this result in our revival if we follow the practices of the Holy Club and deliberately grow in worship and service of God? Let us see what these men did years ago that transformed them and allowed God to transform the world through them. The purpose of this work is to reveal and understand the thoughts and actions (spiritual exercises) used by the Holy Club to strengthen their devotion to God and service for God.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, 77-80.

<sup>18</sup> *The Oxford Methodists*, 386-411.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, iv-v.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE MEANS OF GRACE

Wesley spoke of what a believer could do to help the workings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Once recognized by providential workings in a person's life and intentionally developed, the Spirit of God has a willing partner in that person. These "means of grace" to Wesley were outward signs, words, or actions to be the normal channel whereby God would give grace to people. Wesley saw that a person could seek God and listed the means, or methods, that would be acceptable to God, and would result in God-given grace. The means of grace, as seen by Wesley, were guided by God through the scriptures and were what people did in order to provide a channel for God to give His presence to those people in a new or renewal way. Wesley believed that a person could seek God by listed means, or methods, that would be acceptable to God. Here Wesley included grace prior to, during, and following salvation.<sup>21</sup> These were not works of people or people trusting in their own service, but means whereby they seek for the presence of God by asking, seeking, and knocking.<sup>22</sup> Wesley is careful to ascribe these works for His grace to have been set forth by God and provided by God for people's benefit and clearly defined as a pathway to seek Him. The three means of grace detailed in the sermon, "*The Means of Grace*", are: prayer, whether in secret or in gatherings; searching the scriptures, (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating on the meaning); and receiving the Lord's

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<sup>20</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 187. This is part of the sermon, "*The Means of Grace*." This sermon contains an important core of Wesley's teachings and is appropriately selected to be included in the volume edited by Albert C. Outler & Richard P. Heitzenrater. *John Wesley's Sermons, An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 157-171.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 11:9-13, KJV. ...ask...seek...knock...If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Supper.<sup>23</sup> These are methods where people can reach out and find the Lord wherever they are in the pathway of salvation. Though it is not listed among the three, there is another to add to the means of grace, one that Wesley assumes. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian as even the Lord's Prayer is plural in form.<sup>24</sup> It is not from an individual but the community. He also promised to be with us whenever two or three are gathered in His name.<sup>25</sup> In context this is referencing power of discipline to the church, but the reference is still to a group rather than to an individual. Wesley says that Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary religion, is indeed to destroy it.<sup>26</sup> Thereby the means of grace for John Wesley are not three but at least four. The fourth not itemized in this sermon is constant community and fellowship.

Wesley understood that the means were not the end but rather a method ordained by God and appointed for the purpose whereby God would give the Spirit to people. These means were to be used as a way of life whereby people may always be seeking God's face. These means were developed by the members during the time of the Holy Club in Oxford and were carried forward throughout the long ministry of the effective members. As opposed to serving God through works, these members of the Holy Club considered themselves saved only following experiences within that gave each an assurance of salvation. The means did not count, only the presence of God. This was not initially known to the Holy Club but came to fruition through the working of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Wesley, vol. 5, 188.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:9-13, KJV. The form is: *Our Father...Give us this day...And forgive us...As we forgive our...And do not lead us...But deliver us...*

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 18:20, KJV.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley, vol. 5, 296. In this same area he goes on to say that not only can Christianity not subsist so well, but it cannot subsist at all, without society,--without living and conversing with other men.

These means of grace were also of no use without the proper attitude of the seeker. In his sermon on Philippians 2:12-13, Wesley argues that “working out our own salvation” consists of doing everything with a single eye to the will of God. It must be with the earnestness of spirit, care, and caution. Everything must also be done with the utmost diligence, speed, punctuality, and exactness.<sup>27</sup> He continues by drawing from Isaiah 1:16-17: “Cease to do evil, learn to do well.” Using the grace already given, run from all sin whether in word, deed, or even the appearance thereof and be zealous of good works, of works of piety, works of mercy, family prayer, and crying to God in secret.<sup>28</sup> This is an active seeking of the living God until one knows of His presence in the spirit, heart, and mind, and recognizes His activity through the individual for the benefit of the church and other people. The means of grace were a tool that members of the Holy Club used to evaluate their own and others effectiveness in seeking God. This evaluation process led the club members into a living relationship with God, one another, and the people being ministered to for their benefit and that of the church.

The four means of grace are inter-related. Without any one of these works, the employment and effectiveness of the others is diminished. Communion has no intrinsic value apart from properly discerning the Lord’s body through prayer. These cannot be properly accomplished without a growing knowledge of the scriptures, which make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Wesley, vol. 6, 510. This sermon, entitled *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, is also found in Outler’s and Heitzenrater’s *John Wesley’s Sermons, An Anthology*, 485-492. The preface on page 485 sums up Wesley’s views. “First, God works; therefore you can work. Secondly, God works; therefore you must work.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15, KJV.

John Wesley and members of the Holy Club placed great emphasis on following the listed means of grace. Those that choose not to emphasize community, prayer, scripture, and communion are simply on a more precarious path but one that a person may not judge as not being Christian. A prime example of this is the Quakers who do not hold the scriptures to the same degree of authority as do Christians that follow Wesley's teachings. Their final authority is not the Bible, the Quaker church, the writings of George Fox, or other leaders, but in Christ himself as revealed by experience.<sup>30</sup> To Quakers the precise wording of the text is not what rules a Christian's heart but the Holy Spirit. This also allows for the continual writing of scripture as they reject a closed canon.<sup>31</sup> This different and degraded understanding of scripture is demonstrated by and allows the Quaker church to reject outward rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>32</sup> The meeting for worship to the Quaker is Eucharist. For Quakers, observance of the Lord's Supper is not essential for the full Christian experience.<sup>33</sup> This path may work well for awhile but removes detailed opportunities to methodically seek God when they choose. The Quakers seek the presence of God through faith in Christ Jesus with all their hearts, expect troubles and persecutions in this world, but are scrupulous about means of grace that are available.<sup>34</sup> These means of grace have also fallen into disfavor or rather lack clarifying teaching from the pulpit of the modern church. There is much about the grace of Jesus Christ, but the means whereby we may successfully follow Him has been neglected.

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<sup>30</sup> Bernard Carter, *The Quaker Bedside Book* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1952), 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (Shippensburg, PA: MercyPlace Ministries, 2001), VIII.

The arguments that John Wesley used for not taking the pastorate at Epworth were so far ranging that to turn to that letter to his father is appropriate. Point ten concludes with a quote from St. Paul, “I would have you be without carefulness.” John Wesley knew that he could best grow where he could attend to the things of the Lord without distraction. “Happy is he that careth only for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.” His opinion at that time was that he would always be working out his salvation while on this earth.<sup>35</sup> Thus a focus on the Lord removes the burden of your own problems and leaves them with the one you trust for salvation. That was not where John Wesley was at this time. One of the major thrusts of John Wesley’s Christian practice that enhanced and maintained the revival was; that which he learned early, he did not cease doing following his salvation by faith alone. This, by his testimony, was not until after he returned from the American colony of Georgia.

John Wesley saw that for an inward and outward holiness, the path of self-examination helped the individual follow after God. In finding the way of helping others to do this important daily effort of considering their own motives, and thereby improving their thoughts and actions, he constantly explored different methods as not one seemed universal. It is for this very reason of experiential religion that John Wesley seems to be preaching law at times while guiding people to salvation by faith alone. Years after salvation at a five in the morning service, John Wesley was speaking on one of the divisions in the church. He said that God tries us every moment, weighing our thoughts, words, and actions, and is pleased or displeased with us. Those who do not believe this

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<sup>35</sup> John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A.* vol. 1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 291.

are taking away the foundation of inward and outward holiness.<sup>36</sup> This foundation of course is the one a person builds on the true foundation of faith in Jesus.<sup>37</sup> The works a person does after salvation do not have to do with ultimate salvation as John Wesley constantly argues. He knows that justification is not two-fold, faith and works, but is single, by faith alone.<sup>38</sup> The focus is not toward the individual for the converted but how then does one walk before God. The Holy Club dealt with this issue extensively and minutely followed the means of grace of the Church of England, expanded on them, and applied them as per the scriptures.

The means of grace gave the members of the Holy Club activities to employ in serving God and in receiving grace from God. There was prayer in its many forms, applications, times, and duration. Scripture was set up as a careful part of each day. Silent waiting when appropriate to hear from Him was discussed briefly.<sup>39</sup> Hearing was as critical to Wesley for himself as was preaching. The Holy Club's methods of self-evaluation caused the members to be actively trained in listening to one another. The activities constantly questioned for each and for self included the Lord's Supper, fasting, Christian conferencing, and self-denial. These instituted and prudential means of grace were enhanced by the Holy Club through the activities of living in their culture. They

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<sup>36</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 4, 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 259. Here Wesley is in dispute with the mystic Moravian teaching of waiting in silence for God and salvation without doing, reading, praying, serving, or hearing. He speaks of the damage done. "Many who were beginning to build holiness and good works, on the true foundation of faith in Jesus, being now wholly unsettled and lost in vain reasoning and doubtful disputations."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 254.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 322-324. Meditation is never extensively discussed by Wesley except as the concept of considering or thinking over something or a book in the presence of God. A silent pondering is a good way to say it. He saw prayer as critical but works as the natural outcome. A focus of meditation only type religion is not Wesley. Wesley is activity through, guided, and powered by prayer.

looked up and saw what needed done, how much they could do, considered the propriety, disregarded the problems and inconveniences, and did something.

The Holy Club used a greater number and better organized list of means of grace than these presented by Wesley to the general church. These means were discovered, adapted, and developed in the testing ground of those few that gathered to read the Greek New Testament. The means of grace became a list, instituted and prudential, that would be used for the testing of those who desired to be preachers under Wesley's guidance.<sup>40</sup> This list in the *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others* divided the means of grace into two categories.<sup>41</sup> The *instituted* ones included prayer, searching the scriptures, reading the Bible with the notes, meditating, hearing, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conference. These, Wesley says by declaring them instituted, are set forth clearly by scripture or the church. These had to do with the scriptural guidance to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.<sup>42</sup> The *prudential* means of grace are for Christians and ministers, and have to do with taking a personal mental tour through one's dedication and devotion to God and people. These means of grace are questioning oneself concerning: personal rules for conscientious growth in grace, attendance at meetings, considering your office, dedication to executing every part of office, watching against the world, denying oneself every useless pleasure, temperance in foods and drinks, drinking of water, taking up your cross daily, and endeavoring to always set God before you.

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<sup>40</sup> Wesley, vol. 8, 322-324. The lists here are more concerned with details of each occurrence for the purpose of increased usage of the means of grace and application of community to the class or band.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 299-338.

<sup>42</sup> Philippians 2:12-13.

Wesley, in speaking of the Holy Club many years later, spoke of these few young men that testified to those grand truths: That without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that this holiness is the work of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do; that he doeth it of his own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ; that this holiness is the mind that was in Christ; enabling us to walk as he also walked; and that we are justified by faith alone. These great truths they declared on all occasions, in private and in public; having no design but to promote the glory of God, and no desire but to save souls from death.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the opposition or argument, Wesley insisted that his trust was only in the work of Christ. He felt these means of grace were ordained by God and were for the purpose of seeking Him.

Regardless of the efforts made, the members of the Holy Club realized that they themselves were without the true religion of God until they had received His presence. They gradually came to realize that salvation was a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>44</sup>

Wesley recommended true stillness before the Lord. He saw this as a patient waiting upon God.<sup>45</sup> Waiting was to be by lowliness, meekness, and resignation, in all the ways of His holy law, and the works of His commandments.<sup>46</sup> These commandments, to Wesley, are the means of grace conveyed to us through the scriptures, practical

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<sup>43</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 6, 281. This is found in Wesley's sermon, *The General Spread of the Gospel*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 47.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5, 196. Wesley wrote, in reference to Exodus 14:13, where the refugees from Egypt were fleeing from Pharaoh and trapped against the Red Sea, Moses told the children of Israel "to stand still." They "stood still" by marching forward with all their might through the dry ground at the bottom of the Red Sea.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 248.

application, and observation of effectiveness of their use. He also understood that a person could be using all the means of grace, be harmless in all he does, do good for others by giving of alms, attend church services and yet have no true religion at all. To Wesley, the kingdom of God, or true religion, is the consequence of God's dwelling and reigning in the soul.<sup>47</sup>

The efforts of service made by the members of the Holy Club to God and people were continually under attack from many angles. John Wesley defended the charge of salvation by works by referring to the writings of the Apostle Paul. In the scriptures, Paul indicates that salvation by works means either seeking to be saved by observing the ritual works of the Mosaic Law or by expecting salvation for the sake of our own works, by the merit of our own righteousness.<sup>48</sup> Neither of these is implied in Wesley waiting on God in the way He ordained. Wesley expected God to meet and bless. This expectation of blessing was not due to any works or the merit of his righteousness, but only through the merits, the sufferings, and love of God's Son, in whom He is well pleased.<sup>49</sup>

Wesley consistently preached that means of grace are available and that they should be used. This was so frequent that it occasioned a split between the Methodists and the Moravians in the summer of 1738, Mr. Spangenberg leading the dissention. Wesley's charge against them was that they were Antinomians who leaned toward Quietism or a mystical waiting on God's presence.<sup>50</sup> This charge was caused by the Moravians attacks on Wesley's use of means of grace and Wesley's concern that: 1. there

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<sup>47</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 250.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5, 196.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 30.

was error in their doctrine, 2. there was sin allowed in their practice.<sup>51</sup> The Moravians understanding was not to use Wesley's means of grace at all for the purpose of seeking salvation. The means of grace, that the Moravians spoke against using for the purpose of seeking salvation, were: 1) going to church, 2) communicate, that is to take communion, 3) fasting, 4) much private prayer, 5) reading the scriptures, 6) doing temporal good, such as caring for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers, 7) doing spiritual good such as reading or expounding the scriptures to others or guiding them to church or the Lord.<sup>52</sup> This dissention was repeated in Wesley's journal along with his affirmation of these means along with a short defense stating that these are means of grace which do convey God's grace to unbelievers and that it is possible to use them without trusting in them.<sup>53</sup> This is demonstrated in Wesley's assertion that these means were not the way of salvation. He states that members of the Holy Club had wandered for many years in the new path of salvation by faith and works, only to find that God revealed to them the old path. That was the one of salvation by faith only.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley stated that many built holiness through the means of grace on the foundation of faith in Jesus, being grounded on a faith with works.<sup>55</sup> In his eleventh discourse on *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*,<sup>56</sup> Wesley focuses on Matthew 7:13-14 about entering in at the strait gate and following the narrow way. This concludes with

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<sup>51</sup> Wesley, vol. 2, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 27-28.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 257-258. Wesley also says here that many fruits of the Spirit are given by those who have them not themselves. And that those who have not faith, or but in the lowest degree, may have more light from God, more wisdom for the guiding of other souls, than many who are strong in faith. There is a stronger and lengthier argument from pages 275 to 282 in the same journal but that is not in the scope of this paper, so it will not be drawn upon at length.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 275.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, 405-413.

his admonition to “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” not only by this agony of soul, of conviction, of sorrow, of shame, of desire, of fear, of unceasing prayer; but likewise by ordering thy conversation aright, by walking with all thy strength in all the ways of God, the way of innocence, of piety, and of mercy. Abstain from all appearance of evil; do all possible good to all men: deny thyself including thy own will, and take up thy cross daily. Thus he speaks to guide all into the means of grace.

These means of grace, here developed and defended, were concepts that were adapted from the time of the Holy Club. This was a normal walk with God and used for continuing that walk in the midst of a fallen world. There was the constant danger of falling away from a walk with God. Wesley saw that there were two extremes in a walk of holiness. One extreme was thinking that they were in light and joy and that the work was ended, when in reality it had just started. The other extreme was thinking that the work had not begun, when they felt heaviness, because it had not ended.<sup>57</sup> Here is a clear example of a Christian’s walk of holiness that includes striving for the presence of God rather than resting on what has occurred in the past or worrying about what is to come in the future. This walk with Christ is a daily living in His presence. Wesley states that when we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness, begins; and afterwards we are gradually to “grow up in Him who is our head.”<sup>58</sup>

These works of seeking the grace of God through ways designated by Him, as opposed to mystic waiting, permits the continual growth in understanding through the scriptures, fellowship, prayer, and the presentation of the Lord’s Supper. Both require humility but the mystic’s pride in self and solitude has always been revealed. To use the

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<sup>57</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 249.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 6, 74.

means of grace is to humble oneself continually due to the reading, teaching, fellowship, and confession of sin that is so great a part of the Lord's Supper. Thus humility is revealed in this obedience and will be demonstrated to be a large part of the theology of the Holy Club in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HUMILITY TO BELIEVE

John Wesley sees being born again as the entrance to sanctification or the threshold of sanctification. The new birth is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day.<sup>59</sup> The path of sanctification was that taken by the members of the Holy Club. They took the route of service to God through the means of grace without, and prior to, the understanding of the true nature of salvation.<sup>60</sup> This was due to their imperfect knowledge of the scriptures and a lack of receiving or being able to understand the testimonies they did receive. These testimonies are found both in the words of true believers and in the scriptures. The Holy Club did not dispute these testimonies. They simply did not hear or receive them to the point that there were any thought or discussions about them. They were attempting to serve God through faith and works with the hope that the creator of all would receive them.

The foundation of the Holy Club was not in disputing with others or judging and condemning others. The foundation of their work was in judging and condemning themselves.<sup>61</sup> Thus the members of the Holy Club based their seeking of God on their understanding of their own deficiencies and need of His presence in their lives. Neither did they seek the desire of honor from others, even for their devotion to God. John

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<sup>59</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 205.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, 311. Wesley believes, “We are accounted righteous before God, justified only for the merits of Christ.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 321.

Wesley refers to the “pride of life” of 1 John 2:16, which deals with not loving the world, as the desire of honor, the esteem, admiration, and applause of men. He felt that nothing more directly tends toward pride than the honor that comes from men.<sup>62</sup> This evil disease called pride is a continual proneness to think of oneself more highly than a person ought to think. Wesley contends that if a person can detect this in themselves, then they would be able to think of themselves as they ought to think.<sup>63</sup>

Members of the Holy Club were despised and called names such as Methodist as they attempted to live by rules.<sup>64</sup> Many, who initially overcame their pride to join them, did fall away from times of temptation, a thirst for the praise of men, and a fear of the contempt of others.<sup>65</sup> Even George Whitefield was initially ashamed to be seen with the Methodists. But this eventually wore off and he chose to bear contempt with those people of God.<sup>66</sup>

Wesley defines humility as a right judgment of ourselves which cleanses our minds from those high conceits of our own perfections and from that undue opinion of our own abilities and attainments. Humility convinces us that in our best state we are all sin and pride, and that we let confusion, ignorance, and error rule over our understanding. It also helps us see that unreasonable, earthly, sensual, and devilish passions have authority over our will. Thus we discover, through humility, that our whole soul and nature are out of course. This also convinces us that we are of no help to ourselves.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Wesley, vol. 7, 7. This is from Wesley’s sermon, *The Danger of Riches*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 89. *On the Education of Children* has some interesting views on removing pride from children by very limited praise. It would be valuable for someone to take and use these views and those of Susanna. vol. 1, 385-396.

<sup>64</sup> *George Whitefield’s Journals* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 46.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>67</sup> Wesley, vol. 5, 203.

Thereby, the very initiation into Christianity is by the realization of your own self worth being far less than you know. Without the acknowledgment of the need, one does not seek the remedy.

Wesley found that he was in need even on his journey toward the American colonies in 1735. In the storms he realized his fear of death and this caused him shame at his unwillingness to die.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to himself Wesley saw how the Moravians handled themselves in humility to the other passengers and acceptance in the face of death. This affected him enough that he wrote of their statements in his journal. The Germans served the other passengers, which none of the English would do, taking no pay while saying, “it was good for their proud hearts,” and “their loving Savior had done more for them.”<sup>69</sup> Their meekness was displayed, and again made a huge impression on Wesley, by never retaliating against any abuse. He saw them as having been delivered from pride, anger, and revenge. During one of their services a great wave broke over the ship, tearing the main sail in its fury, and the Moravians sung on in their hymn. The English screamed, cried, and trembled. The Moravians replied to Wesley’s questions that they nor their wives or children were afraid to die.<sup>70</sup> Wesley found a testimony lived out that he was not able to reconcile with what he saw as his own lack, and that revealed by fear. The Moravians service to others and fight against pride through action he recognized as useful tools from the experiences of gatherings and service of the Holy Club from Oxford. This

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<sup>68</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 20. On the following page of this journal, he asks himself, “How is it that thou hast no faith?”

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 22. Wesley did not have this faith himself, but he did use the Germans example to try to guide the English toward fearing God.

life without fear in the face of death caused him to seek understanding for that which he did not have.

This seeking of knowledge was one of the main results of seeking humility in the Holy Club. Wesley saw that the Moravians had some teaching or experience that he had not found. The concept of learning from others and keeping ones eyes open for new concepts was developed through the Oxford Holy Club. The initial gathering of two or three young men by Charles Wesley was due to his setting himself to study in his second year at Oxford. This diligence led him into serious thinking and observation of the weekly sacrament to which he persuaded these few to attend with him.<sup>71</sup> This gained Charles and the others the harmless name of Methodist. About six months later, John Wesley left his pastorate at Epworth and went to assist the group.<sup>72</sup>

This group had a single eyed earnest focus on God. In John Wesley's sermon, *The Witness of our Own Spirit*, he describes what simplicity of heart is necessary for salvation.<sup>73</sup> This is that focus on God wholeheartedly. When one aims at God alone, with all their heart for all they desire with a steady view of promoting His glory alone, then they will be full of the light of heaven. On 11 June 1731, Wesley wrote his parents, concerned about a dispute arising at Oxford, as many were in opposition to the Holy Club's endeavors to live in love with God and man in community.<sup>74</sup> This letter reveals a mind set on total devotion to God and seeking the best means of attaining this. The Holy Club had gathered and debated the controversy surrounding them and wondered about the

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<sup>71</sup> John Whitehead, M.D., *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A. with The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* vol. 1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 72.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 5, 139.

<sup>74</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 266-268. He questioned them as to whether they had perceived the Holy Club to be "faulty in this matter, too superstitious or enthusiastic, or whatever it is to be called." He was truly seeking guidance with openness.

criticism of them being overly righteous, too strict in religion, and whether there was danger if they had fallen into that extreme. Wesley sought his parents advice as to whether there was merit in these accusations or if there was any other error that they could help him to understand, and as soon as possible. Wesley's letter described some of the results of the Holy Club's gathering. "All the ways of being too righteous or too strict, which we could think of, were these: either the carrying some one particular virtue to so great a height, as to make it clash with some others; or, the laying too much stress on the instituted means of grace, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law; or, the multiplying prudential means upon our selves so far, and binding ourselves to the observance of them so strongly, as to obstruct the end we aimed at by them, either by hindering our advance in heavenly affections in general, or by retarding our progress in some particular virtue." The members realized that their opponents thought they were laying too heavy a burden upon themselves, a burden too heavy to be carried, and therefore too heavy to be of any use to anyone. This conflict within the college reveals the notice that this careful religious dedication had made upon all. Not only were fellow students shunning members of the Holy Club, but the faculty was aware of their dedication.

In this same letter to John Wesley's parents,<sup>75</sup> which came out of the Holy Club's deliberation, the members reveal a steadfastness to continue on their path unless a clearer way can be shown to them. They also state that almost everyone will think rules needless, if they themselves do not need that rule, and if the aim is higher than their own it is thought of as "enthusiasm": that which we would term "emotionalism" or "legalism"

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<sup>75</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 266-268.

today. Thus, the group understood that those who do not practice with them would be against them. They were dedicated to the proposal of living for God with all their strength and constantly seeking a better way to do the same without deviation of object. These were conscious of their own integrity and had no other object than to serve God in righteousness and holiness and to benefit all peoples. This response of staying the course in face of opposition was not pride but rather humility to their purpose of seeking God, especially when all oppose. They put their purpose above people's approval or disain of them.

This disciplined way of life followed by the Holy Club had as its goal the love of God and the service of people. There was another element involved however. This had to do with the salvation of their soul. Toward the end of 1733, John Wesley turned toward understanding the presence of God with His people. He found little understanding from advisers or his mother. The typical understanding of the day about salvation was what Wesley had, but this was inadequate. He felt that he had to pass through various states of mind concerning his understanding, will, and affections or rather emotions. Thus, he saw Christian experience is a progressive work.<sup>76</sup> It was over five years following this that the illumination of the reception of the Spirit of God instantly transformed this dedicated seeker into a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. His understanding of singleness of sight upon God was not discarded but rather intensified following his conversion. In his sermon, *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VIII*,<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 284-285. This is found in letters exchanged between Wesley and his mother where they agree on this point of a gradual salvation through election, understanding, works, and faith. Perhaps best put by Susanna Wesley that she really does not understand the subject and she still worships an unknown God. (see p. 284, letter dated 1 January 1734).

<sup>77</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 5, 362. This is from a collection of sermons that Wesley published in 1747 (see vol. 5, 1), so we can observe that his concept of single eyed focus on God had not diminished or been corrected, except enhanced, following his conversion.

Wesley speaks of intention as the “eye” of the soul. As the eye guides the body, intentions guide the soul. The intentions are said to be single, “when it looks at one thing only; when we have no other design, but to ‘know God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent,’ to know him with suitable affections, loving him as he hath loved us; to please God in all things; to serve God (as we love him) with all our heart, mind, and soul, and strength; and to enjoy God in all, and above all things, in time and eternity.”<sup>78</sup> The major enhancement or perhaps correction from the days of the Holy Club would be the emphasis of loving God and especially to serve God, and Wesley adds, “*as we love him.*” His emphasis, though maintaining singleness of eye or rather intention, was slightly converted to loving God through service rather than serving God to love him. So the focus became love rather than works, and yet the outward appearance would not have altered. Years later, Wesley still spoke of this as exercising the presence of God and that this means of grace cannot be used without obtaining fruit. “Do you endeavor to set God always before you; to see his eye continually fixed on you? Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue. And the more you use them, the more you will grow in grace.”<sup>79</sup> Single eye focus on God was both their starting point and their destination.

Part of this deliberate raising of God in hearts of the members of the Holy Club was accomplished by lowering their own estimation of themselves. As Samuel Wesley, John’s father, was seeing that his health was failing, he pressed upon John to take his pastoral ministry position. John responded at length but the portion that concerns us here is that part which revealed a heart humbled before God and people. One of the first

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<sup>78</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 5, 362.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 323-324.

enumerated points was his concern for the glory of God.<sup>80</sup> Wesley mirrored his father in saying that the glory of God and the different ways of promoting it are to be his sole consideration and direction in any of the choices in life. Anything else, to John Wesley, had no weight when compared to God's glory. This was a close family, with constant communication, and it was common for John to freely share his heart with his parents without constraint or concern of how it may sound to those who did not know and love him. Therefore, we can take these words as pure evidence of a heart that set God before his own concerns. This decision for humility was a large part of loving God. Wesley's decision making methods are revealed within the response to his father.<sup>81</sup> He set all other reasons aside in order to understand how to determine his direction in this matter as to whether to apply for his father's position. With an eye directed only for God's glory, he was able to dispel doubt and stand fully assured as to which course to take. With this assurance, he knew that he could best gain holiness and best ensure his own spiritual healing by staying in Oxford.<sup>82</sup> This concern for inner healing was that which brought the Holy Club together<sup>83</sup> and that which continued throughout John Wesley's long life.<sup>84</sup> This is a revelation of a heart that stays open to Christ and does not trust its own evaluation or ability to follow the holy and true God.

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<sup>80</sup> Dr. Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 65. This was point #2 in this letter of 26 numbered divisions. He sent a copy of the entire letter to his brother Samuel also.

<sup>81</sup> Coke, 64.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 66, Item 4 and 5.

<sup>83</sup> Wesley, vol. 13, 265. In this article, *Thoughts upon a late phenomenon*, Wesley relates that many years before, two or three young men met together, desiring to be scriptural Christians. These met "in order to help one another in the way to heaven." This referenced the days at Oxford, years before his own salvation through faith in Jesus.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, 248. Wesley considered that the means of seeking salvation should be continued. Here, many years after his salvation experience with his heart being strangely warmed, Wesley asks other clergy to meet him that they could consider how they should proceed to save their own souls and those that heard them.

None of the members of the Holy Club meeting in order to live a scriptural Christian life sought for pre-eminence, but rather mutually sought the best way to proceed on their chosen course. They did find continual resistance and complaints of their strict observance of seeking God with all their hearts. However they carefully considered and understood resistance was to be expected. John Wesley, in a letter to his brother Samuel dated 17 November 1731, said he was frequently reminded of a saying by the man who examined him for priestly orders for the Church of England. Dr. Hayward said, “Do you know what you are about? You are bidding your defiance to all mankind. He that would live as a Christian priest ought to know that, whether his hand be against every man or no, he must expect every man’s hand should be against him.” Wesley went on to say, “It is not strange that every man’s hand who is not a Christian should be against him that endeavors to be so. But is it not hard that even those who are with us should be against us; that a man’s enemies (in some degree) should be those of the same household of faith? Yet, so it is. From the time that a man sets himself to his business, very many, even of those who travel the same road, many of those who are before him, as well as behind him, will lay stumbling blocks in his way. One blames him for not going fast enough, or for having made no greater progress; another for going too far, which, perhaps, strange as it is, is the more common charge of the two.”<sup>85</sup>

There were charges of being “singular” which we would translate today as being unique but in an unfavorable manner such as odd or peculiar. These charges caused many to withdraw from the fellowship of the Holy Club as they loved the favor of people and feared what people would think of them. Wesley only understood that this was a reason

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<sup>85</sup> Coke, 61-62.

to work harder, not as leader, but rather as helper to all who would listen. He knew that he could not be holy enough so he must keep his eye on the prize of the high calling. This was not for the honor of rule, but the focus of Christ. He felt the duty of using the instituted means every time he could and the prudential means to be resolutely embraced.<sup>86</sup> If these were seeking honor of people within or outside of the group, these complaints would have been resolved as to how to diminish the negative impact. Instead the criticism was understood and found to be of less value than the purpose of seeking God with all their hearts.

In order to find the scriptural Christianity they were seeking, members of this group were closely guided by John Wesley. He found his initiation into this concept by reading Bishop Jeremy Taylor's *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying* in 1725. Wesley says he was moved by those passages that related to purity of intention. Thereby he resolved to dedicate all his life to God. He felt that there was no half way place. One is either a sacrifice to God or to oneself, which is the same as the devil.<sup>87</sup> The following year, after reading Thomas a' Kempis, he realized that one must give all one's heart to Christ or no effort is of any use. This was further strengthened through the works of William Law, and Wesley determined, through the grace of Christ, to be devoted to God.<sup>88</sup> It was with these concepts that Wesley heard a serious man tell him, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember, you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions, or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Coke, 62. Wesley defended himself on several points in this same letter to his brother using reason of seeking God to be the pre-eminent purpose for all things, not the fear of people's displeasure, whoever they might be.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 46.

Thus Wesley came to understand that he had to be part of others or he could not find the path that was the most important aspect of life. Humility is the most important part of fellowship and yet this was subservient to the type of fellowship for these dedicated individuals. When he had been elected to a fellowship at Lincoln College, he discarded any of his acquaintances whose conversation he found injurious to him with respect to religion.<sup>90</sup> In humbling himself before God and people, Wesley placed the holiness of God above anything or anybody else. It was in this consideration that he also never saw it proper to leave the Church of England.<sup>91</sup> Thus the humility that was the norm of the Holy Club was a respect toward God, the scripture, each other, the church, and those without any of the above. These men humbled themselves that God would use them and diligently sought that which they saw as the most important aspect of human life to God. They eagerly looked for holiness in thought, word, and deed.

Knowing that the one they sought was the Creator and separate from the creation helped the Holy Club consider what they sought. It was not a casual search for the members of the Holy Club. In order to find a satisfying relationship with God, they saw they must also find personal holiness that went beyond action but into the very heart and will of a person. Thus their quest had strong elements of testing themselves and further development of what holy means, which we will develop in the coming chapter.

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<sup>90</sup> Coke, 39.

<sup>91</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 8, 321. Dissenters are those who renounce the service of the church. Wesley says we do not, we dare not, separate from it. And we never make light of going to church, either by word or deed. Our service does not supersede the church service.

## CHAPTER 3

### SEEKING GOD AND HOLINESS

In the introduction to a *List of Poetical Works*, published in 1739, John and Charles Wesley qualified some of their writings as dependent on the scheme of mystical writers, which they since deemed in error as to the true way of salvation.<sup>92</sup> John and Charles Wesley set the gospel of Christ in opposition to these who would purify their souls through privation. They say, “‘Holy solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than ‘holy adulterers.’ The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.”<sup>93</sup> This was in line with what the Holy Club gradually came to accept as the normative Christian fellowship. They had come through a transformative time of their lives aided by the presence of each other as they corporately sought holiness.

John Wesley’s initial letter to his father when declining the position at Epworth, spoke of his best opportunity to gain in holiness at Oxford rather than at Epworth.<sup>94</sup> His purpose in seeking holiness for himself was to then be able to promote holiness in others. His father replied that it is not for self but for the glory of God that we should direct our lives.<sup>95</sup> He continued to attempt to turn his son to care for the flock and family that he felt he was soon to leave. Samuel Wesley was in total agreement with his son and the Holy

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<sup>92</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 319.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 14, 321.

<sup>94</sup> John Whitehead, M.D., *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A. with the Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* vol. 1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 286.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Club that Christianity could not be a solitary religion consisting of austerity and fasting. The academic life, however, was to be preparatory work for this social religion where one lets the light shine for others.<sup>96</sup> Samuel's focus at this point was that John would take over the ministry at Epworth and therefore said this light was to apply to everyone who would go into the Church of God. He then continues with the argument that those who stay at the universities become without the vigor or the life that makes them useful to the world.<sup>97</sup> John's father followed this argument with the idea that people are not to be fixed on any certain point of duty but to take into account the complicated view of all the circumstances of life.<sup>98</sup> The eldest son, Samuel Jr., also took up the cause to convince John to accept the post with a strong letter. He thought no one could move John's mind except He who made it. He then continued with an observation. "1. I see your love for yourself, but your love to your neighbor I do not see. 2. You are not at liberty to resolve against undertaking a cure for souls. You are solemnly engaged to do it, before God, and His high priests and his church. Are you not ordained? Did you not deliberately and openly promise to instruct, to teach, to admonish, to exhort those committed to your charge? ... Your faith is already plighted to the contrary; you have put your hand to the plough, to that plough."<sup>99</sup>

John's response was an educated orderly dealing of each point of his father's and brother's. His first point is the most critical in understanding him.<sup>100</sup> John spoke of his

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<sup>96</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 287.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 287-288.

<sup>100</sup> John Wesley was organized in all that he did. He seemed to number every chance he got to clarify his own reasoning for himself and for didactic purposes. This letter has twenty-six points.

assurance of his father joining him in seeking the will of God in this situation.<sup>101</sup> He spoke of God as his protector and he only needed to seek God's will. John Wesley truly felt that if one sought God with their whole heart, that God would not let that one suffer through their own error. This is referencing the holistic biblical focus of John Wesley's developing theology. John knew that all things would work together for his good by the simple statement of Romans 8:28, even his own error. This belief was only through seeking Christ and not a fatalistic abandonment of responsibility or intellectual recklessness.

John Wesley used intelligent arguments and logic but depended on the works of God. This is his way of seeking holiness. Do all you can and then depend only on God. His second point was that the glory of God would be his only purpose in life and then continued on this line of reasoning with point three saying that the best way of promoting glory to God is that which promotes holiness in ourselves and others.<sup>102</sup>

Wesley did not consider holiness to be "fasting, or bodily austerity, or any other external means of improvement, but the inward temper, to which all these are subservient, a renewal of the soul in the image of God."<sup>103</sup> This seeking of God was to be pursued at all cost, even the displeasure of a loved father or brother. Wesley considered the constant fellowship of people with like mind as himself to be critical in seeking holiness.<sup>104</sup> This like mind of the Holy Club consisted of their conviction that they had

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<sup>101</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 288. "being assured of your joining with me in earnestly imploring his guidance, who will not suffer those that bend their wills to his, to seek death in the error of their life." This statement is a wonderful example of the heart of trust this man had for God though, by his own testimony, not yet saved.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 289.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. This is part of point six in his letter to his father. He thought this best revealed in "a complex habit of lowliness, meekness, purity, faith, hope, and the love of God and man."

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. This is point seven in the same letter.

but one work to do on earth and that was the recovery of the single intention and pure affection which were in Christ Jesus. In order to effect this in their lives the Holy Club endeavored to take up their cross daily. This was attempted by denouncing themselves and wholly dedicating themselves to God. Each watched over others soul with reproofs, advice, and exhortations. This was the greatest use for advance in holiness that Wesley knew.<sup>105</sup>

The way that the Holy Club sessions and commitments were of value was that these young men were absolutely honest with other in their daily assessments. The method of seeking and growing in open dialogue with another was to apply a specific set of questions that demanded revelatory discussions of each individual and their daily activity. This self-examination as well as group evaluation was essential to growth to these in the Holy Club. Even years later, John Wesley still thought self-examination critical as seen in his sermon *On Conscience*. He said it was proper to practice daily examination of your own heart and to think of yourself as living under God's eye.<sup>106</sup> Wesley also set forth a written set of instructions that were used by the Oxford group which were titled "A Scheme of Self-examination."<sup>107</sup> Wesley saw daily examination of self as a natural and good thing to continue in as a Christian seeking perfection in Christ. He set the Holy Club out to redeem time and to use it all for Christ that nothing be wasted. This was at a time when John Wesley assumed that he was saved.

Whitefield, when he came into the fellowship, soon began to live by rule, and to pick up the every fragment of time, that not a moment was wasted.<sup>108</sup> All in the group

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<sup>105</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 290.

<sup>106</sup> Wesley, vol. 7, 193.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 521-523.

<sup>108</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 47.

attempted to do all for the glory of God. These guidelines for self-examination were detailed and repetitively asked similar questions.<sup>109</sup> The first question in the self examination was the love of God and simplicity. John Wesley says to look only at God and with single-eye, seek God for the prescribed hour, while binding your mind to focus only here and not on the other affairs of the world. He says to question self continually. Have I done anything without a perception that it was the will of God? Have I done anything that was not a good in devotion to God or people? Have I said anything without knowing it to be the will of God or a good act? Have I prayed with fervor? John Wesley then approaches this question to times of the day, days of the week, before, during and after activities, public and private in order to put God above all. These questions are helpful in that they refocus and train your mind to be aware of God's presence and to be continually seeking Him. There were other questions relating to prayer. Have I prayed for humility, faith, hope, and love? Who was I with the last hour and did I treat that person with love, humility, self-denial, patience, and thankfulness? Have I asked my Savior to assist me the next hour in so doing? Have I prayed diligently, seriously, fervently alone and aloud, early, at noon, at evening, before meals and after? There were similar questions to apply to one self about good works to others.

It is to be noted that the church has fallen far from these standards of devotion and service to God and others set forth by John Wesley. The greatest commandment is detailed here in Wesley's focus toward God and toward people. His love toward people, demonstrated in the list from "A Scheme of Self-Examination," has to do with personally caring and building relationships with people. The sum of these questions to self is: Has

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<sup>109</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 11, 521-523.

good-will been, and appeared to be, the impetus of all my actions toward others? There is the final call to prayer in all relationships. Have I properly used intercession? This is then carefully applied to all in every situation: before and after speaking to anyone, for friends on Sunday, for work associates during the week, for those who asked for prayer, and for the family in which I am, every day.

God calls people and they seek to find Him. John Wesley and the Holy Club from Oxford detailed a path to seek God with all their being through devotion and praise of God and by obedience to the Word of God. They then continually re-evaluated how they were doing in order to improve. God responded and brought them to the people and knowledge that helped them understand their own broken hearts and find faith in Christ. This path to God, though gradually developed during the time at Oxford, was not initiated by John Wesley or one of his associates. The actual society form goes back to Dr. Anthony Horneck who may have adapted certain parts of the teachings of Dr. Spener who was an influence when Dr. Horneck was educated at Wittenberg.<sup>110</sup> This movement to societies was started under the ministry of Dr. Horneck and the Rev. Mr. Smithies in 1678. The first organization of the Society for the Reformation of Manners was in 1691, predating the Holy Club by many years.<sup>111</sup>

John Wesley's father, Samuel Wesley, Sr., received material from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in late 1701 which led him to Dr. Woodward's book about the religious societies.<sup>112</sup> Dr. Woodward's book gives an account of the

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<sup>110</sup> D. E. Jenkins, *Religious Societies (Dr. Woodward's "Account")* (Liverpool, UK: Hugh Evans and Sons, LTD., 1935), 6.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 7. These organizations used informers, the law, and judges, as well as clergy, toward reformation.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 9.

chance gathering of several students at Dr. Horneck's house due to their like problem of being greatly stirred by his sermons to the place of concern for their own souls.<sup>113</sup> They shared their distress one with another and finding empathy due to their plight became intimate acquaintances.<sup>114</sup> They soon found themselves meeting once a week for the purpose of edifying one another with a set of rules to examine their actions in light of Christ's teachings. Their meetings also caused the accumulation of monies for the benefit of the poor and the gospel.<sup>115</sup> After reading Dr. Woodward's book, Samuel Wesley, Sr. established a Religious Society at Epworth on 7 February 1701/02 with eight other persons. The Holy Club was greatly advanced from Dr. Horneck's earlier group but it is plain that influences through books, other societies, and even John Wesley's own father enhanced the development of the Holy Club, which we can now see is an example of the Religious Societies of their past.<sup>116</sup>

John Wesley continued these Religious Societies throughout his life and ministry. They had many variations and applications as the need arose but the continuation of them speaks loudly of John Wesley's consideration of how necessary they were. On 30 January 1763, Wesley preached a sermon before the Society for the Reformation of Manners.<sup>117</sup> He spoke of the natural gathering of people of like-mind whether for evil or holy purposes. John Wesley, in this same sermon, speaks of the gathering of people to be "the original design of the Church of Christ. It is a body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. This was first published in 1697.

<sup>114</sup> Jenkins, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Dr. Woodward relays testimonies from some of the young men of the religious societies. He restates that they better discovered their own corruptions, the devil's temptations were made more obvious, and they better learned how to counteract these temptations through each others experience.

<sup>117</sup> Wesley, vol. 6, 149.

afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, the religious society in its many forms is, to Wesley, evangelical and an integral part of the local church where the Spirit of God works through each group member for the benefit of the other. On 13 July 1764, John Wesley wrote a general letter to any who were not in a society.<sup>119</sup> These were saved individuals that had not joined a particular group to share life with in weekly meetings of open discourse. He refers to these that come “half-way” as causing harm rather than the obvious good they would do for themselves and others. He speaks of the various reasons for not joining and concludes with admirable advice: Try it six times and see if all your dislikes or negative reasons vanish away. He says that the society or small group, though separate from the church, is necessary and a normative part of Christian life. These strong feelings, projected to others logically and scripturally supported are the result of the growth in himself and his companions during the years of the Holy Club. To John Wesley, the fellowship itself contributed to growth through shared experience and guiding each other to be true to scriptural holiness.

The influence of believing the Bible was greatly enhanced through this fellowship of the Holy Club. Belief was critical but these took their reading to application toward the ultimate goal of holiness. These members were dealing with reality in religion and this generally has to do with observations and feelings.<sup>120</sup> This fellowship also followed common sense and Scripture, and frequently found something in Christian antiquity that

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, 150.

<sup>119</sup> Wesley, vol. 3, 188-189.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 248. “They saw or felt some impending or pressing evil, or some good end necessary to be pursued.”

was very similar.<sup>121</sup> The most similar and consistent in all antiquity was the reliance on scripture. They found it necessary to come together due to the struggle of the world against the holy life. By being together, guided by scripture, and the plainest reason, they strengthened one another through mutual prayer and conversation.<sup>122</sup> This strict emphasis on scripture is the guiding light for all of the Holy Club's purposes and reasons for their very being.

That which was most instrumental in their growth was reliance on the study of and daily guidance of the scriptures. The days of their lives were focused there in order to save their own souls, aid others, and be a positive influence to the world as we are about to deal with in the coming chapter.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 8, 249.

## CHAPTER 4

### BIBLICAL AND STUDIOUS

The members of the Holy Club had diverse backgrounds. John and Charles Wesley had one which was biblical focused while George Whitefield was raised in a poor, non-clerical situation. Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles, raised her children with the Bible foremost in her and their thoughts as far as it was possible for her to impress upon them its significance. George Whitefield came upon the scriptures through the impressions of God on his heart as he listened to exponents of the word. There is a decided move of God in each of these situations. The Wesleys were prepared by those prepared through generations of covenant with God while George Whitefield was selected from the masses of undedicated people. Yet their ministries did not rival each other in effectiveness. God does His work in calling people to Him through those who will answer His call and seek holiness through the knowledge of the scriptures. Regardless of the day, there is no way for people to find the path to salvation except through the Messiah given for all who will believe in Him. This is surely what has been handed down for generations through the scriptures.

Susanna Wesley guided her children through the scriptures and to the scriptures. Her first guidance was for each to be put into a regular method of living as soon as they were able.<sup>123</sup> She then proceeded to the most important thing in order to form the minds

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<sup>123</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 387. This is a letter from Susanna to her son, John, dated 24 July 1732. This letter, recorded from page 387 through 393 of this journal, was in reply to John's request of her to tell him of her principal rules in educating her family.

of children. This was to conquer the will and thereby bring them to an obedient mindset.<sup>124</sup> This was not to break their spirit or deny them freedom but to make them obedient to the parents. She felt that this was the only strong and rational foundation for a religious education.<sup>125</sup> Self-will was, to Susanna, the root of all misery and sin and therefore to correct this is to promote future happiness and piety. She taught the children to read using the Bible as the reader.<sup>126</sup> As the children grew older and multiplied, the oldest would take the youngest and the second the next and read a Psalm and a chapter of the New Testament in the evenings and a Psalm and a chapter of the Old Testament in the mornings. They then went to their private prayers.<sup>127</sup> This education which focused on submission and the scriptures resulted in all three of her boys being brought into the ministry. The combination of these factors along with patience and love resulted in a biblical stance in all things for her three boys.<sup>128</sup>

George Whitefield was raised in an almost opposite situation from the Wesleys. His father died when he was two years old.<sup>129</sup> He described himself in these journals as brutish in his early years and hating instruction. This is further testified to in his inability to live with his married brother and be cordial to the brother's wife.<sup>130</sup> He had not the advantage of a Susanna Wesley guiding him to obedience although he was grateful to his mother for focusing on his education, though secular.<sup>131</sup> George Whitefield

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<sup>124</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 388.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 389.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 390.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 391.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 386. Susanna spent time with each child, one evening a week was dedicated to each child, or two children if they were small.

<sup>129</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 37.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. He says his proud heart kept him from speaking to his sister-in-law for three weeks at a time.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

felt God's call on his heart very early<sup>132</sup> and particularly after he returned to school after a two year hiatus beginning at the age of fifteen.<sup>133</sup> George Whitefield became serious toward the things of God and a righteous life by degrees. Through education and communication with others he went through times of laxity and severity according to his friends at the time until he decided to prepare for Holy Communion. He afterwards had a dream that he was to see God on Mount Sinai but was afraid to meet Him.<sup>134</sup> From the time of the dream, he stood his ground on morality, wasting time, and became different from others. George prepared himself by seeking God and praying for perseverance against temptations.<sup>135</sup> Soon after entering Oxford at the age of eighteen he was sought after to join in the partying spirit by those in his own common room. His constant refusal led them to leave him alone and regard him as a "singular odd fellow."<sup>136</sup> He soon came into the fellowship of others with like minds and a year later, the Methodists, also called the Holy Club. The revelation of God to George Whitefield through the breaking of God's word in times of laxity and direct communication through dreams left him without arguments against, and only a prejudice for, the scriptures.

The Holy Club at Oxford was initiated by two or three fellow students getting together with Charles Wesley in order to attend weekly sacrament and to observe the method of study prescribed by their university. They met two evenings a week for three hours to pray, study the Greek New Testament, and read classical works.<sup>137</sup> These

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<sup>132</sup> *Whitefield*, 39.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. Whitefield felt a great foretaste of God's love while attending service accompanied for a hungering and thirsting. Yet this was not a dedication nor resulted in one at this time.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>137</sup> F. Luke Wiseman, *Charles Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1932), 27.

classical works were read in Greek and Latin.<sup>138</sup> This group was studious and focused on service of God. John Wesley joined the Methodists group in 1729 and became their leader by natural ability and as the older brother. He was also fluent in Latin and easily quoted the Greek and Latin poets. His knowledge of the Greek New Testament was so extensive that it was as available to him as the English one was.<sup>139</sup> Wesley's guidance brought a discipline that was too severe except for those resolute in their dedication to seek and serve God.<sup>140</sup>

George Whitefield joined the Holy Club in 1732 due to Charles Wesley's openness and willingness to help and guide others. Whitefield states that this first interview with Charles was the most profitable of his life due to his need of spiritual friends of like mind.<sup>141</sup> Charles gave Whitefield books that had to do with dedication to the Lord. At this time it was Professor Francke's *Against the Fear of Man* and *The Country Parson's Advice to his Parishioners*.

The use of valuable spiritual books was the standard of the Holy Club. They used William Law's books such as *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* and *Christian Perfection*.<sup>142</sup> Wesley and others made use of Law's books also for understanding of God's desire of perfect living.<sup>143</sup> Early in their ministry, John and Charles Wesley visited Mr. Law two or three times a year.<sup>144</sup> John Wesley never forgot some of the remarks Mr. Law made to him. "You would have a philosophical religion, but there is no such thing. Religion is the most plain, simple thing in the world. It is only, 'We love him, because he

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<sup>138</sup>Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 46.

<sup>139</sup>Coke, 35.

<sup>140</sup> Wiseman, 28.

<sup>141</sup>Whitefield, 46.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>143</sup> Wesley., vol. 1, 99.

<sup>144</sup> Coke, 63. John and Charles walked about sixty miles as his advice to them was so valuable.

first loved us.” However later in his ministry, John Wesley found much harm in Law’s writings as Law wrote against the assurance of salvation in the individual.<sup>145</sup> In reply as to John Wesley’s seeing so little fruit from Law’s work for the gospel, Mr. Law said, “You reverse matters from their proper order. You are to follow the divine light, wherever it leads you, in all your conduct. It is God alone who gives the blessing. I pray you, always mind your work, and go on with cheerfulness; and God, you may depend upon it, will take care of his. Besides, Sir, I perceive you would fain convert the world; but you must wait God’s own time.”<sup>146</sup>

John Wesley says that it was in reading Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living and Dying With Prayers Containing the Whole Duty of a Christian* where he started to take a more exact account of how he spent his time, writing down how he had employed every hour.<sup>147</sup> This and Thomas a’ Kempis were the most practical books that Wesley used in preparation for holy orders in the Church of England.<sup>148</sup> Wesley found Kempis’ *Christian Pattern* too strict but there he found that true religion was seated in the heart and thoughts and not just in words and actions.<sup>149</sup> In Taylor’s chapter on purity of intention, John Wesley was convinced that one must be holy in heart.<sup>150</sup> This chapter gives lists of how to be pure intentioned and how to test your intentions. The core of this teaching is given by Taylor in an example. “If a man visits his sick friend, and watches at his pillow for charity’s sake, and because of his old affection, we approve it; but if he does it in hope of

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<sup>145</sup> Wesley, vol. 12, 197. This letter to his sister is dated 1757 and thus we see that Wesley never turned from reading or seeking knowledge of others but with a critical eye that placed scriptures above all.

<sup>146</sup> Coke, 64.

<sup>147</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 3.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Watson, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley, A. M.* (New York: The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1955), 12.

<sup>149</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 99.

<sup>150</sup> Watson, 21.

legacy, he is a vulture, and only watches for the carcass. The same things are honest and dishonest: the manner of doing them, and the end of the design, make the separation.”<sup>151</sup> Taylor lists ten rules for intentions and starts with the concept of reflecting on every action as to its end, why you do it, what do you expect as a reward? These ten rules embellish on the ways of considering your purpose in everything to the desired effect of doing all only for the glory of God.<sup>152</sup> Taylor closes this section with a quote. “‘He is to be called evil that is good only for his own sake. Regard not how full hands you bring to God, but how pure. Many cease from sin out of fear alone, not out of innocence or love of virtue;’ and they, as yet, are not to be called innocent, but timorous.”<sup>153</sup>

Another positive influence for John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were in books of those who prescribed full dedication of all thought and action to be toward God. These books of religious understanding guided the Holy Club’s way into more learned reading and scholarly pursuit in order to please God in all things. John Wesley, through Taylor’s teachings, resolved to give every part of his life to God. Though Kempis’ teachings, he resolved to give his heart to God. Through Law’s teachings, he realized that only through Christ’s grace was it possible to devote all his soul, body, and substance to God.<sup>154</sup> These teachings, though insufficient for salvation, brought John Wesley and the Holy Club to the place of not only reading the Bible, but studying the Bible with the understanding that it was the one and only standard of truth,

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<sup>151</sup> Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Dying With Prayer* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883), 13.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-16.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>154</sup> Coke, 45.

and the only model of pure religion.<sup>155</sup> John Wesley concluded that religion was a uniform following of Christ, inward and outward.

The Holy Club studied the Greek New Testament and spoke on religious matters extensively.<sup>156</sup> John Wesley said years later that fifty or sixty years ago, two or three young men, desiring to be scriptural Christians, met together for that purpose. This purpose was to assist one another in the way to heaven.<sup>157</sup> These men of the Holy Club followed all that the university demanded but only if permitted by “their one book, the Bible;”<sup>158</sup> This section of John Wesley’s *History of Methodism*, continued with the statement that these churchmen who were members of the Holy Club, had one desire and that to be Bible-Christians; taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive church and their own as their whole and sole rule. John Wesley, as a tutor for students, worked not only to make them scholars but also Christians.<sup>159</sup> For a man of letters and renown for use of languages, John Wesley had an intense focus toward Godly purposes. His goals were made obvious in his address to his peers, the university tutors. Part of the message recorded for us by Coke and Moore is John Wesley’s concern for the tutors’ care of students under them. “Do you continually remind those under your care that the one rational end of all our studies is to know, love, and serve the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent? Do you inculcate upon them, day by day, that love alone never faileth? (Whereas, whether there be tongues, they shall fail; or philosophical knowledge, it shall vanish away) and that, without love, all learning is but splendid

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>156</sup> Coke, 46.

<sup>157</sup> Wesley, vol. 13, 265.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 348.

<sup>159</sup> Coke, 42.

ignorance, pompous folly, vexation of spirit?”<sup>160</sup> In the same spirit of discerning the proper use of time, energy, and education; John Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel as he, his brother Charles and others were embarking on a journey to the New World. He wrote to not only teach “the beggarly elements of Greek and Latin, but much more in the gospel.” He reminded Samuel that Christianity is not a negative or external thing, but a new heart, a mind conformed to that of Christ; faith, working by love.<sup>161</sup>

Charles Wesley has more than 150,000 lines of musical composition in his collected works. Dr. Rattenbury estimates that not more than one in two thousand references a secular work and these include Milton and Young.<sup>162</sup> Charles’ knowledge of the Bible, which was his chief inspiration, was extraordinarily accurate. Dr. Rattenbury concludes that if the Bible were lost, a skillful man could extract much of it from Charles Wesley’s hymns. John Wesley called himself a man of one book, but he read many, while Charles Wesley seems to be truly a man of one book. His hymns are observed to be biblical patchwork.<sup>163</sup>

John Wesley carefully included the scriptures in the instituted means of grace listed in his *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others*.<sup>164</sup> He says to search the scriptures by reading some part every day, regularly, all the Bible in order and carefully with the notes.<sup>165</sup> He included the admonition to do this

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>161</sup> John Whitehead, M. D., *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A.* vol. 2 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 7.

<sup>162</sup> J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954), 47.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>164</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 8, 323.

<sup>165</sup> This article was published in 1789 and Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* was published in 1754, so I assume he intended to refer to these notes. The alternative can be the extensive notes of the 1599 *Geneva Bible*.

reading seriously, with prayer before and after, and immediately putting into use that which you learn there.<sup>166</sup> The wisdom of John Wesley is clearly seen in that these means of grace were to be used by the individual as well as the church.<sup>167</sup> He encouraged all to have a New Testament near them at all times; such was his regard for the Word of God.<sup>168</sup> In his translation of the New Testament with his notes, John Wesley included some interesting notes in his preface. “But I write chiefly for plain, unlettered men, who understand only their mother-tongue, and yet reverence and love the Word of God, and have a desire to save their souls.”<sup>169</sup> He considered “the scriptures of the Old and New Testament a most solid and precious system of divine truth. It is the fountain of heavenly wisdom, which they who are able to taste prefer to all writings of men, however wise or learned or holy.”<sup>170</sup>

John Wesley consistently attended to the Word of God in all his preaching and worship. This was his own pathway to salvation, service toward God and man, and how to maintain a Christian life. In his sermon, *The Witness of our own Spirit*, Wesley speaks in terms that cannot be mistaken as to his view of the scriptures. “But the Christian rule of right and wrong is the word of God, the writings of the Old and New Testaments; all that the Prophets and the ‘holy men of old’ wrote ‘as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;’ all that Scripture which was given by inspiration of God, and which is indeed profitable for doctrine, of teaching the whole will of God; for reproof of what is contrary thereto; for correction of error; and for instruction, or training us up, in righteousness. (2

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<sup>166</sup>Wesley, vol. 8, 323.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., vol. 8, 322.

<sup>168</sup>Wesley, vol. 8, 323.

<sup>169</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), 6.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 9.

Tim 3:16). This is a lantern unto the Christian's feet, and a light in all his paths. This scripture he receives as his rule of right and wrong, of whatever is really good or evil. He esteems nothing good, but what is here enjoined, either directly or by plain consequence, he accounts nothing evil but what is here forbidden, either in terms, or by undeniable inference."<sup>171</sup> In his sermon *On a Single Eye*, Wesley speaks of the attention of the individual being divided or focused on things of this earth as being evil and thereby remote from all real knowledge, real holiness, and happiness. He then quotes a deist as saying, "I think the Bible is the finest book I ever read in my life; yet I have insuperable objection to it: It is too good. It lays down such a plan of life, such a scheme of doctrine and practice, as is far too excellent for weak, silly men to aim at, or attempt to copy after." John Wesley's reply has to do with what the scriptures say: all things are possible with God.<sup>172</sup>

John Wesley contended that from a child he was taught to love and reverence the Scriptures as the oracles of God and next to these, to esteem the primitive Fathers, that is, the writers of the first three centuries, which he referred to as the primitive church. After these, he felt the Church of England was the most scriptural national church in the world.<sup>173</sup> At this time in the Church of England, the preface of the First Book of Common Prayer (1549) speaks strongly in favor of the effectiveness and divine origin of the Scriptures. There it states that all the Bible should be read over once in a year that the clergy should by often reading, and meditation of God's word be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute

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<sup>171</sup> Wesley, vol. 5, 136.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 298.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, 272.

them that were adversaries to the truth. The people, by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in the church, should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be more inflamed with the love of true religion.<sup>174</sup> Thus the direction of the Church of England was in its statements evangelical though without the power of heart in John Wesley's day. These attempts by the members of the Holy Club to bring themselves into accord with God's Word also directed their steps toward prayer and a deliberate dedication to communication with God.

The scriptures, though containing the word of God, are without power unless one uses that found within and seeks the author behind all the authors. The Holy Club, due to many influences, chose to believe the scriptures and employ that knowledge in actively seeking and praying to God. These many forms of prayer, duration, and timing were critical to the daily life of these young men and their mutual relationships. This affected themselves, each other, the One whom they sought, and the world about them as we shall see.

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<sup>174</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 866.

## CHAPTER 5

### PRAYER AND BELIEF

John Wesley's directions for singing are still maintained in the preface for *The United Methodist Hymnal*.<sup>175</sup> Item VII says to above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing and aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or others. In all things do it with all your heart and especially worship of God. It is this intention and deliberate action that John Wesley has always called people to. He is in agreement with Augustine on this point. What matters to Augustine is our intention. We cannot attain God by our own efforts, but we can want to attain God and to be loved and saved by Him.<sup>176</sup> This purity of intention is the focal point of worship and prayer and this was normal for Wesley and others who preached the gospel.<sup>177</sup> It was not to find a special and innovative way of saying something or to discover the perfect form of worship or prayer but rather to present and worship a special and perfect Savior. This pure intention that John Wesley sought was found in his decision to make the glory of God his only consideration.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publ. House, 1989), VII.

<sup>176</sup> George Mursell, *English Spirituality from Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>177</sup> Ed.: Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 2. In an historical note, prefacing *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, the editors tells us that "the question the Fathers considered was not what they supposed Holy Scripture might mean, nor what they, from *a priori* arguments, thought would be consistent with the mind of God, but something entirely different, to wit, what they had received. They understood their position to be that of witnesses, not that of exegetes. They recognized but one duty resting upon them in this respect - to hand down to other faithful men that good thing the Church had received according to the command of God. The first requirement was not learning, but honesty. The question they were called upon to answer was not, What do I think probable, or even certain, from Holy Scriptures? but, What have I been taught, what has been entrusted to me to hand down to others?"

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 65.

This is particularly seen in prayer and worship. His intention of giving glory to God in every part and parcel of his life resulted in constant focus on God whatever the situation. John Wesley thought that to do the will of God was paramount in all that he did. He applied this focus to prayer as well as to all other aspects of his life. Once he did not want to preach, but did and said it was, “much against my will, but I believed it was the will of God.”<sup>179</sup> John Wesley understood that the heart, and thereby prayer, was the key to true religion.<sup>180</sup> He was a Bible scholar and knew that true religion was the kingdom of God which was righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.<sup>181</sup> Therefore he knew that he must love the Lord God with every part of his being and that meant following Jesus in all his mannerisms and prayer.<sup>182</sup>

The time of the Holy Club was a period when John Wesley and other members of the club sought God through a later acknowledged incorrect path of salvation by faith and works rather than the old way by faith only.<sup>183</sup> At this period of life he responds with lists, rules, activities, and detailed communication to check on his and other’s progress and adherence to rules with like minded members of the Holy Club.

In a later defense of Methodism, John Wesley says the society or Holy Club meetings do not supersede church services but rather pre-suppose public prayer.<sup>184</sup> He lists four parts of public prayer: deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving.

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<sup>179</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 274.

<sup>180</sup> Coke, 45. From Kempis’ *Christian Pattern*, Wesley realized that he must give all his heart to God with simplicity of intentions and purity of affections. One love ruling all his emotions was necessary.

<sup>181</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 5, 77. Romans 14:17 is referenced by Wesley.

<sup>182</sup> Coke, 46. At this time Wesley felt religion was a uniform following of Christ and a total conformity to God, both inwardly and outwardly.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 275.

<sup>184</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 8, 321.

These were not conducted in the normal Methodist society meeting of the time.<sup>185</sup> Within the “means of grace” the first and most critical mean is prayer which John Wesley details in its various forms of private, family, and public. He asks if each of these forms of private prayer is used and when. His “when” is specific as to morning, evening, and an hour before or after morning preaching. He also deals with retiring for prayer at five o’clock.<sup>186</sup> This hour long devotion, one of many parts of the structured discipline of the Methodists, of the morning and evening were almost insurmountably difficult for George Whitefield who had not been raised by Susanna Wesley.<sup>187</sup> This devotional time had been set as an example for John and Charles Wesley by their mother, Susanna.

Mr. Gambold was acquainted with the Wesley brothers from March, 1730 onward and left us a letter concerning his views of John Wesley. He noted that John had a continual recourse to God. John thought prayer to be more his business than anything else.<sup>188</sup> When he and others embarked on the *Simmons* for the colony of Georgia, John Wesley’s journal says that the only reason for the trip was to save their own souls, that is, to live wholly for the glory of God.<sup>189</sup> This small group from Oxford became regular in prayer and disciplined their lives even aboard ship.

Prayer was seen as the most important and therefore most prominent part of each day. There was private prayer from four to five each morning with public prayer at eight. Evening prayers were conducted at four until time for an hour of private prayer starting at five. At seven in the evening, there were public services of various types for the divergent

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<sup>185</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 8, 322.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 322-323.

<sup>187</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 21.

<sup>188</sup> Richard Watson, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley, A. M.* (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Episcopal Church, 1855), 37-38.

<sup>189</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 17.

passengers.<sup>190</sup> This prayer time was consistent with the normal use of time of the Holy Club members as they strove to lose no time idle. At Oxford, they would meet together every night, begin with prayer, review what had been done during the day, discuss what should be done the day following, and end with a small supper.<sup>191</sup>

Public and communal prayers were common and regulated with the Holy Club, but primary focus was placed upon the private secret prayers for an hour each, morning and night. Each member of the group would frequently stop and check themselves as to whether they were using the proper fervor.<sup>192</sup> They would also offer up prayers during the course of the business of the day for humility, faith, hope, and love. They offered a grace before and after meals.<sup>193</sup> This was a way of life that put God, self-examination, and accountability first in their lives. These works combined with faith in Christ did not affect salvation for any member of the Holy Club. However, each gradually one by one came to a more pure understanding of God over several years which brought them to know of a hope of eternal salvation through faith alone.

The Holy Club sought the love of God and simplicity. They came to the conclusion that these things may be achieved by prayer and meditation. They used self-examination to determine whether there has been determined growth in these areas. Their push for God to occupy every moment of their lives was intense. The first enumeration about prayer entailed simplicity in observing that God is good, the perfect pattern to emulate, and the one to desire.<sup>194</sup> The action or time spent praying was also questioned

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<sup>190</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 17-18.

<sup>191</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 1 (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2003), 69-70.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 72-73.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 73.

<sup>194</sup> Coke, 47.

whether it was simple, distinct, and uninterrupted. They attempted to never do or say anything without knowing that it was the will of God or that it was a means of access to God. The second area that needed constant questioning by the individual within the Holy Club was the intensity of their emotions, timing, and will about their prayers.<sup>195</sup> Their self-examination about each of their prayer times took them far beyond their hour in the morning and another in the evening. This indicated a continual flow of prayer throughout the day. They also periodically inquired of themselves if their intensity of prayer was enough and whether they had initiated every prayer with the acknowledgement that they did not know how to pray. They insisted on concluding every prayer with the statement that this can only be received through Jesus Christ, their Savior, who was at that moment interceding for them at God's right hand.<sup>196</sup> This guides our understanding of the Holy Club's hope and yet they combined faith in Christ with faith in their own works, which is thus deficient faith in Christ.

The third area of prayer examination by members of the Holy Club's list is so detailed that it hardly seems possible that these men could be doing anything except residing in a monastery. The very opposite was the situation. Due to their deliberate focus on intensive and constant prayer, members of the group found themselves doing more for others in both spiritual and physical areas than it was thought possible. Questions they asked themselves were: Have I used short, spontaneous prayers daily? Have I prayed every hour for humility, faith, hope, love, and the particular virtue of the day? Have I offered all I do to my Savior, begged His assistance, and commended my soul into His

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<sup>195</sup> Coke, 47.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 48.

keeping? All this prayer was to be done deliberately, constantly and hourly, not in haste, seriously, and fervently.<sup>197</sup>

Deliberately, seriously, and fervently were the added words to any admonition to any prayer by and for the Holy Club. They rejected prayer that did not contain these elements of true religion; that is, “of the heart.” These three words were applied to praying for the virtue of the day, in using a prepared prayer at nine, twelve, and three, for grace, said aloud, prior to and after eating.<sup>198</sup>

Members of the Holy Club were not demanding perfection of their prayer life but rather expected failure freely admitted which would guide them to greater adherence to their prayer guidelines. This prayer was not the meditation of the mystics. John Wesley wrote to his brother, Samuel, discussing the errors of the mystics. The mystics did not understand the means of grace to be continually used but only sought a goal. John Wesley noted that the mystics sought emptiness and a passive state devoid of all reason, thought, and understanding in order to be guided by an obscure, general knowledge. Wesley said the mystics discard means of grace, hope, faith, the exercise of virtue except for works, and public prayer.<sup>199</sup> Pride of self seems to be the mystics main characteristic according to Wesley. The meditation or prayer done by the Holy Club members was a simple thinking over conscientiously and was to be done everyday from six to seven, four to five, on Sunday from six to seven on Kempis, three to four on redemption, Wednesday and Friday from twelve to one on the passion and after ending every book on that which had been marked.<sup>200</sup> The Holy Club’s deliberate, serious, and fervent prayer life reached

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<sup>197</sup> Coke, 48.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Tyerman, vol. 1, 133-134.

<sup>200</sup> Coke, 48-49.

into every aspect of their relationships with God, one another, and others outside of their close circle. This is inspiring and near impossible unless one sees their purpose as a means of growth, not a standard that was demanded and graded. This would cause a perpetual growth in sanctification particularly through the daily reporting to one another and the continual prayers unto God: deliberate, serious, and fervent.

John Wesley wrote *A Collection of Forms of Prayer* and first published it in 1733 during the days of the Holy Club.<sup>201</sup> These forms of prayer were used by the members as a small part of their daily exercises of prayer. They were used for a focus for self-improvement through each week. Sunday's questions had to do with the love of God.<sup>202</sup> Monday's had to do with the love of our neighbor.<sup>203</sup> Tuesday's related to humility.<sup>204</sup> Wednesday's<sup>205</sup> and Friday's<sup>206</sup> was mortification. Thursday's focus was resignation and meekness,<sup>207</sup> while Saturday's was thankfulness.<sup>208</sup> To set prayer to a high place in our busy lives as these of the Holy Club did is almost inconceivable. Yet to simply use this daily focus is to understand the purpose of the activity was to set one's mind on loving God, loving your neighbor, humility, mortification, resignation and meekness, or thanksgiving would bring one into direct contact with the God who is present and ever active in all lives. This would aid in our growth and developing holiness. In his journal, John Wesley said years later that he had spoken as clear as he could "but God only can

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<sup>201</sup> Wesley, vol. 11, 203. These are initiated and not completed in this edition, vol. 11, 521, with the statement that these were used by the first Methodists in Oxford.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 206-207.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 211-212.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 216.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 221.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 230.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 225.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., vol. 11, 235.

“speak to the heart.”<sup>209</sup> Even at this time the group recognized that it would take God to help them understand.

Charles Wesley did his initial education, following his home schooling, at Westminster. After advancement he started to face life and God seriously following a year’s attendance at Oxford. Charles attributed his serious change of mind to someone’s prayers and thought it probably was his mother’s.<sup>210</sup> Thus the Wesley brothers who helped transform England, Ireland, and the colonies in their lifetime knew of a mystery years before their salvation. From their home, they learned of simple faith that accepted God being an active force in their lives. John Wesley’s mother noted a change in him as he made some preparation to become ordained and hoped it was the result of the Holy Spirit working in his heart.<sup>211</sup> She urged him to earnest self-examination as to whether he was truly called and elected to such a post. It is obvious that the children raised in this home were guided into a spiritual understanding of God who yet today is involved with the creatures that He created. John Wesley writes that in the last illness of their father, which lasted eight months, Samuel Wesley found a clear knowledge of his acceptance with God. He heard his father say many times, “The inward witness, son, the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.” This was prior to the trip by the four members of the Holy Club to the New World, and prior to their salvation so this made little sense to the brothers.<sup>212</sup> Charles wrote to their brother, Samuel, Jr., two days after their father’s funeral telling what he could at the time. Charles said that their father

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<sup>209</sup> Wesley, vol. 4, 429.

<sup>210</sup> Henry Carter, *The Methodist Heritage* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), 17.

<sup>211</sup> George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism* vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859), 101.

<sup>212</sup> Luke Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley* (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, UK: Tentmakers Publications, 2003), 444. originally published by Simpkin, Marshall and Co., London in 1866.

also said that the weaker he was in the body, the stronger and more sensible support he felt from God.<sup>213</sup> John and Charles Wesley found many testimonies and guidance of the presence of God within their own family.

It was after their father's death and the trip to the New World that John and Charles Wesley also came to the rudiments of an understanding of salvation but this was not their first notion that people are spirits also. As children they first came to experience supernatural phenomenon in the parsonage at Epworth. This has been mocked at by those contrary to Wesley for any number of reasons.<sup>214</sup> Southey, more noted as a poet, along with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge<sup>215</sup> wrote a life of Wesley but used pejorative terms so often that this work is suspect.<sup>216</sup> Smith in his Wesleyan biography quotes Richard Watson as wondering if Mr. Southey was a believer in Christianity. Mr. Smith's reply was in the affirmative but thought that John Wesley's piety was too profoundly spiritual for Southey's understanding in either philosophy or religion. Southey thought that Wesley's profession of religion and witness of the Spirit was the result of disease.<sup>217</sup> Southey also contended that John Wesley deceived himself and the love of power was the ruling passion of his mind.<sup>218</sup> Southey does provide the largest compilation of the family letters regarding Jeffrey,<sup>219</sup> as the family started referring to whatever made the groans

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<sup>213</sup> *Samuel Wesley*, 445.

<sup>214</sup> Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley* vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1825), 16-20.

<sup>215</sup> Author of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* was also the temporary pastor of a Unitarian Church.

<sup>216</sup> Southey, vol. 1, 16. In a note Southey says the veracity of supernatural stories must be found in a contagious nervous disease. On page 18 he hints at Rev. (the husband) and Mrs. Wesley being ignorant people. This is obviously not the case but the prejudice against spiritual things is enormous. Page 374 has Coleridge giving his clear views in a note. "And this angry and damnatory pre-determination to believe such effects of the preternatural, *i.e.* of a ghost or devil, was in the most intelligent and incomparably the most sober-minded of the family. Judge then of the rest."

<sup>217</sup> Smith, 592.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

<sup>219</sup> Southey, vol. 1, 372-395.

and noises, and for similar material the work has value throughout. The criticism of John Wesley continued after his demise in those who refuse that which is beyond reason. Wesley went out of his way to determine whether things such as apparitions are true or not. It was hard even for him to keep to the middle way of not believing too little or too much.<sup>220</sup>

One account of apparitions that John Wesley recorded also included his reasoning for belief. This he says was the strangest apparition he ever encountered but could find no pretense to disbelieve. He mentions that there were several points of the experience that he could not understand but that means little to him as he also does not understand how grass grows or sand sticks together. He contests that he cannot deny well attested facts just because he does not understand them. Even at that time, the learned of England and Europe had given up on witches and apparitions as old wives tales but John Wesley saw no reason to compliment these who were in opposition to and ridiculed the Bible as well as those who have gone before.<sup>221</sup> He knew that if dialogue with separate spirits be admitted it destroys deism, atheism, and materialism. John Wesley says neither reason nor religion requires that this weapon against heresies be removed from our grasp. He speaks of those who ask if you have ever seen an apparition as false reasoning as he has never seen a murder but from the testimonies of others he believes in both.<sup>222</sup>

The point made by John Wesley is to believe the Bible and you will have all the ammunition you need to thwart the enemies of the gospel. More reason than this is found in occurrences that are part of the fervor of revival. Susanna Wesley was initially

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<sup>220</sup> Wesley, vol. 3, 202.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 324.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 325.

prejudiced against her sons due to the reports of errors and extravagances. When she started attending the societies or small groups of believers, she found them speaking the word of God and was satisfied though people were seized with trembling, uttering loud cries, or falling into an agony from their conviction of sin and fear of judgment.<sup>223</sup> Some would suddenly rise testifying that they had redemption through the blood of Christ and forgiveness of sins. John Wesley attached no significance to the outward agitation but believed the profession of an inward change as he had seen many changed in their conduct and spirit.<sup>224</sup>

John Wesley and the members of the Holy Club were open to whatever the Bible proposes as true. In accepting this, they felt they were opening a conduit for God for His blessing. To deny the scripture account or be more worldly intelligent than it says loses the presence of God. Wesley says that no stress had been put on anything but what is undeniably in the word of God. The stress was proportionate to its ability to affect our love of God and neighbor. Thus John Wesley sees the Holy Club's effect on the revival as devoid of superstition and thoroughly scriptural.<sup>225</sup>

This core of belief in the scriptures includes things outside of normal understanding and allows the word of God to be freely examined. It was made much clearer to receive the plain spoken word that is given to all who will. Due to the group's belief, the amount of discipline to rules could be cut down and the people could find freedom in speaking of their joy and salvation. The position of prayer as the most important part of each event brought the Bible into focus and then supernatural belief

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<sup>223</sup> Wesley, vol. 5, 10.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, 11.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., vol. 8, 206.

brought the possibility of disorder which frequently is part of a revival. The calling, for prayer by all, brought people to understand their own responsibility in bringing in others to the church or fellowship. This resulted in prayer meetings, testifying of their experiences in private and public conversations, and a desire for communion with the Lord for whom, and by whom, all things were made. They found to testify of experiences would allow others to understand what the scriptures meant in their lives. Therefore testimony of life through communion and preaching became a major part of life as we are about to see.

## CHAPTER 6

### COMMUNION AND TESTIFYING

Communion is that one rite of the church that is arguably the most divisive for the body of Christ. Any sensitive Christian entering a church of another denomination is careful to inquire before taking communion as to whether it would be appropriate to partake. The members of the Holy Club were not sensitive Christians entering another denomination. These were all Church of England ritualists, with the possible exception of George Whitefield.<sup>226</sup> They communicated once weekly together at Christ Church and persuaded all they could to attend public prayers, sermons, and sacraments. They observed the discipline of the Church of England. The members of the club approved and followed the doctrine of apostolic succession, and felt no one who was not ordained had the right to administer the sacraments.<sup>227</sup> These were particular to the beliefs of the rites of the Church of England to which they belonged.<sup>228</sup> While in the colony of Georgia, John Wesley demonstrated this adherence to the practices of the Church of England in his refusal to baptize by any method except that approved by the church. The Church of England demanded full immersion of infants at that time.<sup>229</sup> He would simply not go against the rules, or his interpretation of them, for safety, respect, or honor.<sup>230</sup> Neither would he allow those he found fault with to take communion. He excluded all dissenters

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<sup>226</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmakers Publications, 2003), v.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>228</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 146. Wesley always considered that the Church of England “with all her blemishes, is nearer the scriptural plan than any other in Europe.”

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 25.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 31.

until they gave up their faith, principles, and some were re-baptized.<sup>231</sup> Gossiped about was his refusal to give communion to Mrs. Sophia (Hopkey) Williamson. This resulted in his having to escape from Savannah after having attended seven sessions of the court to answer the grievances against him because of the situation about Mrs. Williamson.<sup>232</sup> Tyerman refers to John Wesley's conduct as a priest of the Church of England as arrogant, foolish, offensive, and intolerant.<sup>233</sup> This high church bigotry<sup>234</sup> was how, at that time, the members of the Holy Club saw religion. They thought that true religion was faith and works to reach this perfect God. This time in Georgia was before the individuals had come to faith through the revival and teachings of the Moravians, and therefore the rules could have no latitude but had to be followed in their exactness. John Wesley argued that a Methodist is "one who lives according to the method laid down in the Bible."<sup>235</sup> Thereby all his reasoning for the Lord's Supper had to do with the scriptural admonitions. John Wesley allowed the Bible to be the commentary on the Bible by comparing various translations, reasoning from other portions of Scripture, and use of the original languages.<sup>236</sup> His ability to learn was amazing. In a note concerning the value of his time in the colonies, John Wesley mentions having learned three European languages.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 1 (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmakers Publications, 2003), 147.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 163

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 159.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 151.

<sup>235</sup> Henry Carter, *The Methodist Heritage* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), 100.

<sup>236</sup> Luke Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmakers Publications, 2003), 391. Wesley asked his father, Samuel, which was the most preferable commentary on the Bible and his reply was 'the Bible' for someone who is honest, devout, industrious, and has a humble mind. This was a very strong compliment to his son John.

<sup>237</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 1, 170. The teaching of emigrants in Savannah and learning from the Moravians caused Wesley to learn Spanish, Italian, and German. He was already prolific in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, English, and spoke French (see vol. 2, 135). He normally conversed with Charles in Latin.

John Wesley wrote a sermon on communion for use of the Holy Club and his students in 1732.<sup>238</sup> In February, when this sermon was published, Wesley exchanged letters with his mother about the nature of communion. The summation of what they agreed on was that the Divine nature of Christ is present (without allowing Christ's human nature to be present) to impart, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the benefits of His death to worthy receivers. Thus the communion elements are more than signs, as those worthy also receive the thing signified - all the benefits of Christ's incarnation and passion. Yet John and his mother each emphasized that this union of His Divinity with those that receive Him was a complete mystery regardless of any explanation.<sup>239</sup>

This sermon written in 1732 was published in a selection of sermons by John Wesley in 1788 and his note about it says that he had written it over fifty-five years ago. Though he had shortened it, as he then used more words than he did later, he had seen no cause to alter his views on any point yet.<sup>240</sup> John Wesley initiates this document with that quote from Luke 22:19: "Do this in remembrance of me." He then proceeds to wonder why some who seek to save their souls neglect that which is more dangerous to avoid then to be concerned about doing it unworthily.<sup>241</sup> *The Duty of Constant Communion* was something that the Holy Club took seriously. In a letter to his brother, Samuel, written the year previous to this sermon, John Wesley explains why even those of his own communion consider him odd. The first reason for this rejection is his general purpose of life which is to seek holiness and thereby happiness. He says that the more he keeps his eye on the prize of our high calling, the better, and the more of his thoughts, and words,

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<sup>238</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 1, 81.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 82.

<sup>240</sup> Wesley, vol. 7, 147.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. This sermon of over 3200 words was entitled *The Duty of Constant Communion*.

and actions, are directly pointed at the attainment of this prize. His actions included use of the instituted means of grace to attain this. His rule was to use these means of grace as often as possible.<sup>242</sup> These means of grace included the Lord's Supper and John Wesley felt that these means ordinarily convey God's grace to unbelievers.<sup>243</sup> He obviously also saw that these means were the way for believers to grow in holiness and good works, after building on the one true foundation of Jesus Christ.<sup>244</sup> This understanding of the true foundation was following his conversion. Prior to this he and the Holy Club saw religion as faith and works, rather than faith alone.

The Holy Club communicated weekly at Christ's Church. The initiation of the small gathering was for the purpose of attending communion together.<sup>245</sup> This group became the Holy Club and they continued this practice. Their further plan to obtain the one thing necessary, to know of certainty their salvation, was to live by rule and thereby receive religious improvement.<sup>246</sup> This initial purpose clearly shows how far they were from salvation by faith in Christ alone. To simplify this is to say that their plan was for the individuals to be improved to the place of being able to acknowledge that their salvation was sure. John Wesley was a religious man from a religious family. He initially believed that one was saved through universal obedience of all the commands of God.

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<sup>242</sup> Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 62.

<sup>243</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 258.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 259.

<sup>245</sup> Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley* vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 33.

<sup>246</sup> Abel Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878), 43. This is from an unabridged facsimile by Elibron Classics in 2005. This quote from a letter of Susanna to her son is important. "And now, in good earnest, resolve to make religion the business of your life; for, after all, that is the one thing that, strictly speaking, is necessary; all things besides are comparatively little to the purposes of life. I heartily wish you would now enter upon strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have, the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in any tragedy."

His next hope for salvation was doing various means of grace such as reading the scriptures, going to church, and saying daily prayers. None of this was with an understanding of inward holiness.<sup>247</sup> It was upon further reading and dedication that John Wesley came to the already extant Holy Club and advised them of being careful with time. He also saw the extent of the law and guided them to endeavor to be more and more religious and therefore obey God and His law with all one's power.<sup>248</sup> In reflecting back, John Wesley says that at that time, he trusted his own works and righteousness.<sup>249</sup> This was truly the methodology and reasoning for attending communion but they also understood the deeper sacramental reason for the Lord's Supper.

The Holy Club continued the practice of communion after their salvation as a means of receiving from the Lord, without trusting in it. John Wesley saw several reasons for this continued practice. First, because it is a command of Christ and, as it was, his dying words to his followers.<sup>250</sup> These reasons are again referenced in *The Duty of Constant Communion*, which he wrote prior to his salvation and still approved of over half a century following. He also saw this as an opportunity to be obedient and receive benefits from the Lord. These benefits Wesley found in communion were the forgiveness of our sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of souls in this world of temptations. After all, what better way have we of obtaining forgiveness than "showing forth the Lord's death" and seeking Him for the sake of His Son's sufferings, to blot out all our sins?<sup>251</sup> Wesley then elaborates his reasons: "So often are we to receive as God

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<sup>247</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 98.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 99.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 100.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 147.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 148.

gives us opportunity. Whoever, therefore, does not receive, but goes from the holy table, when all things are prepared, either does not understand his duty, or does not care for the dying command of his Savior, the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and the refreshing it with the hope of glory.”<sup>252</sup> He was especially fond of referencing history as the proper understanding for any duty of Christians of his day. He says that the first Christians received communion almost daily for several centuries: four times a week always and every Saint’s day also.<sup>253</sup>

John Wesley spoke of the nature of the Lord’s Supper which was to be in continual remembrance of the death of Christ, by eating bread and drinking wine, which are the outward signs of the inward grace, the body and blood of Christ.<sup>254</sup> To be worthy to receive meant preparation by solemn self-examination and prayer. Yet these things Wesley did not consider necessary but rather a sincere purpose of heart to obey all the commandments of God and to desire to receive all his promises.<sup>255</sup> The rules laid down by the Holy Club for mutual benefit of all members caused some dissention from their peers at Oxford and even from the teaching clergy of the college. One main complaint was that they were being too strict in religion or rather righteous over much. This was discussed by the members and they could only understand this as possible if their ways lifted one of the means of grace to the point where it clashed with another, or caused them to therefore neglect weightier matters of the law.<sup>256</sup> This is not the case as can be seen from John Wesley’s understanding of lenience in preparation for the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>252</sup> Wesley, vol. 7, 148.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, 149.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A.* vol. 1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 267.

He saw the act of receiving to be consistently more important than the specifics of how much time there was involved with preparation. He felt the continual and as frequent as possible reception of the Lord's Supper to be far more important than spiritualizing the heart. He often spoke of receiving and using the means of grace as often as possible in order to grow in grace.<sup>257</sup> The opponents also thought the members of the Holy Club were adding burden on burden to the point of being hindered in their advancement of some other particular virtue. Wesley, using his classical logic, wondered which would be worse. Would exerting their strength on things unnecessary or would leaving off things, if not directly necessary, that would be useful, be worse?<sup>258</sup> He found that possessing Christ and services that raised the death of Christ to be of prime importance.

The Hebrews demonstrated throughout the Old Testament that they saw no division between the body and spirit of people.<sup>259</sup> John Wesley asserted, following his salvation, that a person could have a degree of faith before he or she has a new, clean heart and therefore could use the ordinances of God,<sup>260</sup> the Lord's Supper in particular.<sup>261</sup> This was further understood by Wesley by experiences of people being saved while taking communion and from their testimonies. He spoke to a group about their first conviction occurring while at the Lord's Supper.<sup>262</sup> He also contended that the first Lord's Supper was to men yet unconverted in that the disciples did not yet have the Holy Spirit and that they were to do this in remembrance of Him. Thus Wesley sees the Lord's Supper as a means of obtaining grace, conveyed by God, either preventing, or justifying,

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<sup>257</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 270.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 268.

<sup>259</sup> George Mursell, *English Spirituality from Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>260</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 282. "those ordinances of God, which our Church terms 'means of grace.'"

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 82.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 279.

or sanctifying, according to the needs of the communicants.<sup>263</sup> He saw that communion was for those who knew they needed the grace of God either to restrain them from sin, or to show them their sins were forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God. John Wesley met a Moravian in Germany who spoke to him of how at communion he came to feel that Christ had died for him. He knew he was reconciled to God.<sup>264</sup> These testimonies and others were critical to Wesley. This spoke of the heart of religion, having to do with the will, emotions, and feelings. Wesley came to understand that the value of the means of grace had to do with their purpose in the individual. If they were not intended to be an avenue to seek and find God, they were nothing and pride. If they do not guide to the love and knowledge of God, they were an abomination to God.<sup>265</sup>

Thereby if the use of the means of grace, such as communion, does not result in a change or sustenance of a change that can be testified to as a work on the soul, these means could become an obstacle to, or a substitute of true religion. At one point Wesley says, “I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it.”<sup>266</sup>

In order to have testimony there must be the place and opportunity. This was a deliberate plan and decision by the Holy Club. Prior to John Wesley returning to Oxford and meeting Charles’ little group of communicants, he met a serious man who told him that if he wished to serve God and go to heaven, he could not do this alone. He told Wesley that he must find companions as the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.<sup>267</sup> This was an admonition that struck sense to John Wesley. He understood this

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 280.

<sup>264</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 134.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., vol. 5, 188.

<sup>266</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 1, 168.

<sup>267</sup> Coke, 46.

companionship to mean much more than a casual church fellowship, but instead to be communities of like minded people open to one another seeking each others' benefit. Therefore his return to Oxford and finding Charles already forming the very thing or fellowship group must have been a confirmation of these words. The community of seekers of the Holy Group read and considered the Greek New Testament, conversed on their understanding of the things of God, and sought more fuller self-examination of themselves which they openly shared one with another.<sup>268</sup>

This open testimony of the condition of the individual's heart could only be shared in a community of like-minded people and therefore it was by invitation or permission before any joined the group, even their study sessions. George Whitefield writes that he desired to be part of this group for about a year before Charles Wesley invited him to visit, permitted visits from time to time, and only gradually introduced him to others of the Holy Club.<sup>269</sup> John Wesley, also, was scrupulous about his companions. While at Oxford he shunned company that was a hindrance to him in religion.<sup>270</sup> He was a seeker, not an evangelist at this point. Outler contents that he was converted at this point.<sup>271</sup> There was a change in John Wesley here as he had chosen to seek God with all his heart. Salvation is not, however, the ultimate work of people. It is not that we seek but that God gives. He died for us that believe in Him.

Years later, John Wesley approaches this very concept in a letter of concern to someone who spoke that "all who mourn after God are in God's favor." This was a new

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<sup>268</sup> Coke, 46-47.

<sup>269</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 46-47.

<sup>270</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 252-253.

<sup>271</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 7.

doctrine and contrary, in Wesley's eye, to the word of God.<sup>272</sup> Wesley gives his testimony that he received of the Spirit when he finally stopped trusting in his own work. Thus the term "conversion" may be appropriate, but it is the conversion or turning of a person. This was not the receiving from God which more appropriately may be termed conversion or transformation of a person by God.

Testimony or openly discussing with others the works of God in ones' heart, mind, and life were core to the concept of growth and seeking after holiness of the Holy Club. John Wesley summed up the Oxford Methodists years later. He said they were unique in that the terms for admittance to their society was only one; a real desire to save their soul.<sup>273</sup> This is the context of that which is so often today used to shun people thought bigoted by their standard of holiness. "Is thy heart herein as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand."

The societies or gatherings were for the purpose of testifying. Even the preaching was at time opened up for testifying. It was considered necessary for growth of the individual to testify in private or public. Even the closed session of some, such as the restricted Holy Club, allowed testimony through open discussion. With a real desire to save his own soul, the person is actively engaged in the process and not there for self-aggrandizement. Yet, even in the most pure gathering, including the Holy Club, rules had to be imposed in order to keep the focus on that single purpose. Their rules for self-examination included an obvious push for a focus on prayer in order to be guided by God to effective testimony in whatever they did and in whatever they said in small or great gatherings. They had their rules divided into two sections: the love of God and the love of

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<sup>272</sup> Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 3, 24.

<sup>273</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 13, 266.

man.<sup>274</sup> To love God was also to love simplicity and the annotation was that the means to obtain this are prayer and meditation. To love people was not this inward, active, time consuming focus on the One. To love people was to do good while preventing, removing, or lessening evil with all one's might, but this included testimony and speaking of religion constantly. Here are the rules that so affected the growth of the community at Oxford and brought down criticism and railings: "1. Have I spent an hour at least every day in speaking to some one or other? 2. Have I given any one up, till he expressly renounced me?" Number three included delving into information about a person as deep as one could before speaking to that person in order to plan the spiritual attack. Four was to exhort the person to consider their motives both calmly and deeply and pray for help.<sup>275</sup> These rules alone are indicators of why the Holy Club soon was doing good works in near-by prisons, work-houses, slums, starting schools, giving alms, preaching to those about to die in sickness or from criminal arrest. They quickly became noticed as they aggressively loved people.

The fifth rule of the Holy Club for loving people is particularly heart opening. "Have I, in speaking to a stranger, explained what religion is not (not negative, not external), and what it is (a recovery of the image of God), searched at what step in it he stops, and what makes him stop there? Exhorted and directed him?"<sup>276</sup> The initial teaching listed in this point is good to correct common misconceptions found everywhere concerning what religion is and is not. Then they continued and changed a casual conversation to one that would not be forgotten but by a few, nor forgiven by some. Their

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<sup>274</sup> Coke., 48-50.

<sup>275</sup> Coke, 49.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

dedicated love of people was purposeful to guide people to a decision of changing their way of life.

These few of the Holy Club gradually developed a deliberate love of people and transformed it into evangelism through testifying to and questioning of others. Not only was their methodology a detailed written plan of evangelism, but it was also an evaluative tool for developing themselves into street evangelists and preachers. This was done through self and group evaluation daily and at times hourly in their attempts in bringing others to religion.<sup>277</sup> These rules of self-examination were for the development of religion for the purpose of saving their own souls. To save their own souls included loving people with all their hearts as well. The rules mentioned here number to fourteen about how to best honor and help others above themselves.<sup>278</sup> Their attempt at self improvement also guided them into respect of others and yet with deficient views of salvation.<sup>279</sup>

This self directed activity for themselves focused their energy on loving God and loving people. Therefore the testimony they had of the word of God, experiences, and understanding of the nature of people caused them to constantly bring what they had to more places and opportunities for others to hear them and to testify themselves. This is made obvious in the voyage to Georgia of four members of the Holy Club who went for the stated purpose of saving their own souls, thereby living wholly to the glory of God.<sup>280</sup> They initiated this journey with a time of exhortation to one another, “to shake off every

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<sup>277</sup> Coke, 50. Rule thirteen of *Love of Man* says, “Have I, after every visit, asked him who went with me, did I say anything wrong?”

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>280</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 17.

weight, and to run with patience the race set before us.”<sup>281</sup> On board ship, the members continued living by rule, or “a little regular,” as they put it, and making use of every moment they could for the glory of God by loving Him and others during this journey of over three months.<sup>282</sup>

On the day after landing, John Wesley spoke to Mr. Spangenberg, a Moravian pastor, and they shared many questions.<sup>283</sup> Wesley had found one of his own understanding as Spangenberg was seeking testimony and giving testimony for the purpose of gaining understanding of the workings of God on the human soul. From the time John Wesley landed in Georgia he started preaching at five in the morning. Once the revival started in England in 1738, he also commenced to daily preach at that hour for his entire life and expected all the societies and preachers to do the same.<sup>284</sup> Wesley testified to all the preachers to join together, fast and pray, in season and out of season convince the church that they are fallen, and exhort them to repent and do the first works. This was in particularly important to John Wesley - rising in the morning, referring to the five A.M. service.<sup>285</sup> Wesley contended that the Methodists were a fallen people if they gave up the five A.M. service and if they ever do, they will degenerate into a mere sect, only distinguished by some opinions and modes of worship.<sup>286</sup> Thus he was shocked when he found preachers only half alive, having given up the morning preaching and only having services on Sunday morning and three or four evenings in a week. He saw that it was easy to answer why there was no increase in their society under those circumstances. He

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 17 through vol. 1, 23. The Simmonds sailed on 21 October 1735 and they placed foot on ground on 5 February 1736.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 23.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 269.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 267.

wondered how a preacher could maintain either bodily health or spiritual life with this exercise.<sup>287</sup> In the same area he found people who heard much, knew everything, and felt nothing. There he heard sermons full of truth but unable to awaken anyone. Therefore, he began to “thunder about death, and judgment, and eternity.”<sup>288</sup> This is an example of what the Holy Club understood about testifying. They knew that it must move the individual or would be of no use but would only lull them on their way to destruction.

The Holy Club of Oxford knew little of salvation by faith when they started but they did understand that the human heart must be stirred or the person would never make a decision to seek God with all their soul and to love others as themselves. John Wesley’s normal services were five in the morning and seven in the evening daily, so that they would not interrupt people’s work.<sup>289</sup> There were testimonies in these services from the preachers and the people. Whenever they gathered they were to confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another, that they could be healed.<sup>290</sup> The core of this fellowship was to seek holiness of heart and way of life. But this could only be affected through diligent service of God and people and with the corresponding self denial that is the root of service to both in time, energy, and resources.

Self-denial was the core of fellowship, prayer, scripture, and communion. Without a determination that set these things above one self, there could be no dedication to God. The means of grace and an emphasis upon them was set above self. Thus there was a deliberate denial in order to replace the individual with the presence of God and use time for His glory, not one’s own kingdom. This became extensive and is revealing of their

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<sup>287</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 3, 167.

<sup>288</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 3, 167.

<sup>289</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 13, 258.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 13, 259.

love and dedication for God and because of God: people. This took on many forms which we will briefly look into in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### SELF-DENIAL

George Whitefield was the first of the Holy Club to come to acknowledgement of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life. This was the knowing that he was accepted by God through the sacrifice of Christ alone. Before this, he was accepted into fellowship of the Holy Club and Whitefield began to do all to the glory of God through the able instruction of Charles Wesley but also the community of the Holy Club. Charles had, previous to Whitefield's admission, loaned him *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.<sup>291</sup> In reading this Whitefield realized that he must be a new creature.<sup>292</sup> This was his first understanding of the new birth. He was well prepared therefore to endure hardship through the teaching and practices of the Holy Club as he had a premise and an intense desire for that which was to come. His immediate attempts to do all to the glory of God included fasting twice weekly, receiving communion weekly, going to secret prayer for an hour morning and evening, engaging in visiting sick and prisoners, reading to the poor people, and spending an hour daily doing acts of charity.<sup>293</sup> Included were the normal

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<sup>291</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publ., 2005).

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 34. Scougal explains that "...true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the Divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, the Apostle's phrase, 'it is Christ formed in us.'"

<sup>293</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 47-48.

times of fellowship, self and community examination, and study of the scriptures alongside theology considered with the Holy Club.

This was not enough as Whitefield's desire for God drove him to seek Christ in all the ways that he understood.<sup>294</sup> At this time, there was a great feeling toward the ascetic practices of fasting and watching through the night.<sup>295</sup> In this light, Whitefield sought the experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ.<sup>296</sup> He then fought what he saw as his own worse sins through prayer, fasting, and watching through weeks of nights and days. These sins he counted as self-love, self-will, pride, and envy.<sup>297</sup> He called himself a penitent and fought against pride by mortifying his will and circumspection. This self observation only revealed to him his pride in thought, word, and action without helping to defeat it.<sup>298</sup>

Those who have found the reality of Christ know that it is impossible to defeat yourself but one has to be changed by the Holy Spirit within. This seems to have been known by Whitefield but he had no teacher. He only had a glimpse of the reality of Christ, not the pathway there. The Holy Club was in the same misunderstanding. These are the ones who by dint of effort made the mistakes and were gradually brought to the grace of God through Christ by the mercy of God. An evangelistic understanding of the scripture was initiated by these men for the generations since. It was John Wesley who gave us the first version of the "Roman Road" understanding of salvation that has been the foundation reasoning of slips of paper, also called tracts, which have led multitudes to

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<sup>294</sup> *Whitefield*, 51. Whitefield testifies that "From my first awakening to the Divine life, I felt a particular hungering and thirsting after the humility of Jesus Christ."

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 52, note 2. "In silent or vocal prayer; and having no body to show me a better way, I thought to get peace and purity by outward austerities."

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

saving faith.<sup>299</sup> Neither he nor Whitefield understood the simplicity of believing and trusting Christ at this time, and their recourse to dealing with the call of God on their hearts was to work, fast, and pray.

The Holy Club kept Lent strictly by fasting except for Sundays, that day not being a part of Lent. This is called a “pleasant bread” fast but they carried it to its literal wording by eating nothing but sage tea, without sugar, and coarse bread during the days of Lent.<sup>300</sup> Whitefield, attempting to further punish his body during this Lent, took walks without proper cold weather attire until one of his hands turned black. He continued his all night watching and inner turmoil until Passion-week that year, 1735, and found he was so weak that he could hardly creep up stairways. This caused a sickness that lasted about seven weeks.<sup>301</sup> Toward the end of this reclusion, Whitefield in his continual seeking simply cried out, “I thirst! I thirst!” Thus was ended a year long frantic and dedicated search as the Spirit of God took possession of his soul and sealed Whitefield, he “humbly hopes”, unto the day of redemption.<sup>302</sup> This is a rather extreme example of mortifying the body to find salvation, but it was not that which brought him to Christ but Christ himself. Salvation was received through mercy of God and much error by Whitefield. He attempted to make himself worthy by defeating his own problems and worshipping God. He found salvation after he had failed and simply called out. The approach that the Holy

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<sup>299</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1976), 541-542. This is a 1754 Wesley translation of the New Testament from the Greek with his notes. The note on Romans 6:18 is as follows: “18. Being then set free from sin- We may see the apostle’s method thus far at one view:- 1. Bondage to sin Rom. 3:9. 2. The knowledge of sin by the law; a sense of God’s wrath; inward death Rom. 3:20. 3. The revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ through the gospel Rom 3:21. 4. The centre of all, faith, embracing that righteousness Rom 3:22. 5. Justification, whereby God forgives all past sin, and freely accepts the sinner Rom 3:24. 6. The gift of the Holy Ghost; a sense of God’s love; new inward life Rom 5:5, Rom 6:4. 7. The free service of righteousness Rom 6:12.”

<sup>300</sup> *Whitefield*, 57.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Club used was different from this that Whitefield did. He was self abusing while the exercises of self denial with the other members were not.<sup>303</sup>

The Holy Club had another experience of self-denial turned destructive with the death of one of their four initial members, William Morgan.<sup>304</sup> This young man's death was falsely blamed on excessive fasting, encouraged by Charles and John Wesley, which increased his illness and hastened his death.<sup>305</sup> John Wesley responded to Morgan's father in a lengthy letter that William had ceased fasting a year and half before, and Wesley had only started less than six months ago. Wesley did at that point go into extensive discussion of the mutual life style of those of the Holy Club.<sup>306</sup> This letter satisfied Morgan's father and afterwards he was ready to defend the Holy Club.<sup>307</sup> This did stir up passions of letter writers into the newspapers.<sup>308</sup> The Holy Club had already become accustomed to slander and was now becoming acclimatized to libel. Some was responded to and some was ignored.<sup>309</sup>

John Wesley wrote to his mother in 1735 to discuss her opinion on Christian liberty, concerning which he had been having many conversations. He found different opinions of what this meant. Liberty from willful sin, liberty from rites and points of discipline at certain times, and liberty from fear of being cast away were considered. He

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<sup>303</sup> Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 85. Wesley did favor those writers who interpreted the scripture in an ascetic mortification way but tempered with sound judgment through fellowship.

<sup>304</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* vol. 1 (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2003), 67.

<sup>305</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1998), 5.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 5-14.

<sup>307</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 1, 84-85.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 85.

<sup>309</sup> Richard Watson, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley, A. M.* (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Episcopal Church, 1855), 38. They seldom took any notice of the accusations brought against them for their charitable employments; but if they did make any reply, it was commonly such a plain and simple one, as if there was nothing more in the case, but that they had just heard such doctrine of their Savior, and had believed, and done accordingly.

thought liberty from denying ourselves in little things as Christ has made us free was not sound. Liberty from restraint in sleep, food, and living by rules Wesley did not comment on in this letter but obviously lived with strictness. The last liberty mentioned was freedom from rules. He said that if it meant yielding our rules to extraordinary situations, that was acceptable, but if they meant no rules at all, that would be too high for him.<sup>310</sup> John Wesley understood Christian liberty as freedom from sin, not absence of rules. He found that there was a law of Christ that had to be adhered to. This law is to renounce love of the world, and to love and obey God with all one's strength.<sup>311</sup>

John Wesley's acceptance of the voyage to the colony of Georgia had to do with his austerity of life and seriousness of thought, which were the very reasons it was offered.<sup>312</sup> This opportunity for growth came with the possibility of service to people in a harsh environment and the hope of converting the Indians. With his mother's approval and his friends' acquiescence, how could John Wesley and others of the Holy Club turn down an offer such as this with little chance of success, likelihood of death at sea, and at the least terrible living conditions? Whitehead says that he has no doubt that the difficulty of the undertaking and the prospect of the hardships had some influence in disposing John Wesley to accept.<sup>313</sup> These four Holy Club members truly saw that austerity of life had to do with salvation of the soul. There had to be a denial of self and a breaking of self-will for spiritual growth. Following salvation, years later, John Wesley saw that the

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<sup>310</sup> John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A.* vol. 1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 301.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 283.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 302-303. John Burton's letter to encourage Wesley to accept listed the reason for the unfitness of most people: state of ease, luxury, levity and inadvertency (*not attentive or observant, especially concerning oneself in this situation*). He also commends those that are accustomed to lack of fancy dress and the conveniences of life. Well had he heard of the Holy Club.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 303.

qualification for faith was belief alone but not belief that was alone. He saw that the scripture and Christ dealt strongly with commandments and therefore he never departed from the works of grace and constantly sought the perfection that could only be found in Jesus.<sup>314</sup> This did not include obeying the ceremonial laws of Moses but rather the laws of Christ as he explains in this same document.<sup>315</sup> Thus Wesley's views on self-denial, in particular the subjection of the will below the will of God as revealed in the heart through the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, had moderated but not changed later in his life. The largest change had to do with purpose rather than action.

The Holy Club sought good works toward people but also sought the reason that they did good works. They were severe in examining themselves and each other in seeking for the motive of the heart that they could identify areas needing improvement as well as encourage an increase in their duty to loving people.<sup>316</sup> They were concerned with service having to do with every opportunity of doing good, and of preventing, removing, or lessening evil. These works of service and love to people were accomplished with an admonition to seek the recovery of the image of God.<sup>317</sup> This guidance for others and doing of good included an acceptance of probable persecution and being despised, as they knew that true good for any individual is to guide that one toward religion and seeking Christ even as they were. Thus, even doing good was an invitation for needed self-denial.

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<sup>314</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 276, 277. Naturally Wesley listed many reasons for his understanding but point three and four are particularly relevant. "3. That although to do what God commands us is a believer's privilege, that does not affect the question. He does it nevertheless, as his bounden duty, and as a command of God. 4. That this is the surest evidence of his believing, according to our Lord's own words, 'If ye love me,' (which cannot be unless ye believe,) 'keep my commandments.'"

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 277. (Col 2:16-23).that the ordinances here spoken of by St. Paul are evidently Jewish ordinances; such as, 'Touch not, taste not, handle not;' and those mentioned a few verses before, concerning meats and drinks, and the new moons, and Sabbaths. That, consequently, this has no reference to the ordinances of Christ; such as, prayer, communicating, and searching the scriptures.

<sup>316</sup> *Whitehead*, vol. 1, 285-286.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 286.

John Wesley says that he often thought of the words of the minister who examined him for priest's orders. "Do you know what you are about? You are bidding defiance to all mankind. He that would live as a Christian priest ought to know that, whether his hand be against every man or no, he must expect every man's hand should be against him."<sup>318</sup> Yet self-denial was not the focus point of John Wesley. His focus was seeking the practical knowledge of God, and an entire conformity to His will. This Wesley found to be a difficult task.<sup>319</sup>

Early in his student life, John Wesley was disturbed by Kempis as he considered him too strict. John Wesley had more confidence in his parents' opinion than any, and so he frequently sought their advice. His mother replied on the question of Kempis saying that she saw him as an honest, weak man that had more zeal than knowledge. Kempis condemned all joyfulness and pleasure as sinful. Susanna Wesley explains that it is not joy but that which strengthens your body over your mind, which is a sin itself.<sup>320</sup> So John Wesley, though focused on God with all he had, did not seek pain but rather God. He did not seek sorrow but conformation to the Spirit of God which brings joy.

In a letter to his mother, John Wesley questions her statement about renouncing the world. He sees that he has been "plunging myself into it, more and more." He wanted to defeat his own love of the world but could not see how. He asked the question of "How?" How to fix his affections on a better goal, namely God and he assumed the answer was to be humble. Here, again we find John Wesley approaching the seeking of

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<sup>318</sup> Coke, 61. Even of the same house of faith, one will blame for not going fast enough and another for going too far.

<sup>319</sup> George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism: Wesley and His Times* part one (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859), 103.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 102.

God through means of the world, rather than abandoning hope here and residing on the Christ.<sup>321</sup> Humility is not the path to God but the result of God. Sacramentarians, like the Holy Club, and legalists look to the result and assume that humility is the path to find an experiential relationship. In this letter to his mother, John Wesley sought her to pray for him that he might attain true humility and self-renunciation.<sup>322</sup> The Holy Club cannot be faulted as these are the ones that have blazed the paths that we follow today. The Holy Club beat down pride through prayer and watchfulness of self. They attempted to turn their nature to child-like simplicity, crowned with love of God.<sup>323</sup>

Self-denial was such a part for John Wesley, that he planned for rejection by the world and saw it as a significant indicator as to whether one is saved. He is deliberately in defiance of worldly wisdom when he says substantially the following. All true Christians are condemned wherever they live, by all who are not so, and know them to be such. This is with all whom they speak since it is impossible for light not to shine. He also, by the same logic, assumed that people are not Christians until they are condemned. If the world does not condemn you, then you are a part of it and not in a state of salvation.<sup>324</sup> In his long argument with his father and brother concerning their request that he take the pastorate at Epworth, John Wesley said that the good he does at Oxford is basically proven by the contempt that some have for him.<sup>325</sup> His elder brother's answer included an able response to this part of the argument. "What you say of contempt is nothing to the purpose; for if you will go to Epworth, I will answer for you, you shall, in a competent

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<sup>321</sup> Smith, 108.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>323</sup> Watson, 38.

<sup>324</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 295.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 296. Wesley's argument in this point, numbered 25, is that being condemned is absolutely necessary to our doing good in this world. God will use the most fittest for His work, the holiest is the fittest, and contempt is so glorious a way of increasing holiness. No man can be holy at all without it.

time, be despised as much as your heart can wish.”<sup>326</sup> Thus, with a bit of sarcasm,<sup>327</sup> the argument continued but Wesley truly saw the great value of experiential rejection by people for increasing holiness through reactive love and patience.

Wesley followed after self denial in order to obey the law of Christ in loving God and the people, all of whom God created and loves. His strictness did not extend to abuse as can be seen in his testimony of his own health at the age of eighty-five. He saw his fitness at this age was due primarily to God’s blessings but also to the prayers of His children, constant exercise and fresh air, never having lost a nights sleep, to having sleep come easily day or night whenever he choose, rising at four in the morning, constant preaching at five in the morning, and having so little pain, sorrow, or anxious care in his life.<sup>328</sup> This lack of anxious care has to do with the focus of the Holy Club which training Wesley continued in his entire life. To focus on others’ suffering is to deny your own.

John Wesley did not have true understanding of how to attain Christian experience during these years of the Holy Club. The dividing line was the two years of suffering in the colony of Georgia. The reason he, Charles, and two others of the Holy Club went there was for the glory of God but also to save their own souls.<sup>329</sup> These carried the concept of holiness to an exact doing of the means of grace, doing service to others, self-denial, and mortification of the body. These were practiced with constant surveillance on one another that they may improve on their holiness, even to the point of going to the wilderness of the colonies. Wesley saw that it was impossible that he should

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<sup>326</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 297.

<sup>327</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 4, 428. Sarcasm was frequently used by the Wesley family. In this reference the 85 year old Wesley speaks of seeing the mausoleum of Mr. Pelham. He saw room for about 100 bodies and said, “O what a comfort to the departed spirits, that their carcasses shall rot above ground!”

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 427-428.

<sup>329</sup> Whitehead, vol. 2, 7.

teach, preach, and guide people to holiness without himself seeking it with all his heart.<sup>330</sup> He saw the way to holiness as defeating his own will and comfort. Therefore he worked and served with all his heart. The scripture was always foremost along with prayer, as we have dealt with, but his response was then, to seek ways to serve God through His creation. He wandered trying to find and seek God through a new path of salvation by works and faith.<sup>331</sup> It was years later that God was pleased to show the members of the Holy Club the way by the old path of salvation by faith alone. Meanwhile they served people through acts of charity and demonstrated love to all while they continued in self-denial and the means of grace.

These means of grace were of no value unless that which was received through them was then expended on the One who gave. Wesley and the Holy Club saw the application of loving their neighbor as themselves as equal with the first command to love God with all their being. Therefore another major emphasis of this busy group was to serve people in whatever need they found them in. The next chapter deals with their response to this call of the heart to love God by loving the creation and in particular the ones made in His image, though fallen.

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<sup>330</sup> Coke, 66. This is point four of Wesley's letter to his father concerning his reasons for not taking the work at Epworth. Wherever holiness can best be produced, that is where he desired to be. It was not the ease, to his thinking, of the pastorate at Epworth but Oxford due to his weakness. Then, it was not the comparative ease of Oxford when the missionary trip to the colonies was offered.

<sup>331</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 275.

## CHAPTER 8

### CHARITABLE

John Wesley and the Holy Club seemed to understand from the beginning of their gathering of the relationship between the Creator and the creation. Wesley states that it was in reading Taylor's *Rules for Holy Living and Dying* that he began to take a more exact account than he had done before.<sup>332</sup> Even then, he did not consider this book to be above reproach, but chose what was good and rejected that which was contrary to his senses.<sup>333</sup> The parts he did receive though helped him toward a more correct relationship with all people. Taylor defines the Christian religion and says it promotes the great profit of all relations and defines the justice part of this religion as that which enlarges our duty in all our relations to our neighbor.<sup>334</sup> John and Charles Wesley were raised in a pastor's home and therefore also saw constant patience being practiced by both their parents. Their guidance was toward all things Christian. Due to these and many other influences, Wesley and the Holy Club redeemed the time and used every opportunity to do good to all people.<sup>335</sup> For these members, to be altogether a Christian, one must love God with all their heart and love their neighbor.<sup>336</sup>

When the Holy Club started visiting the prison, the abuse of their peers progressed toward an outcry. At this point the Holy Club revealed their motives in asking

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<sup>332</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1998), 3. He mentions that was in 1725 in his, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. vol. 11, 366.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 12, 8-9. In this letter to his mother he disagrees with Taylor's statement, "Whether God has forgiven us or no, we know not; therefore be sorrowful for ever having sinned."

<sup>334</sup> Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Dying with Prayers Containing the Whole Duty of a Christian and the Parts of Devotion Fitted to All Occasions and Furnished For All Necessities* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883), 43.

<sup>335</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 5, 21.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

their opponents and friends to answer a few questions.<sup>337</sup> This list of questions had four main sections. The first was should we not seek to imitate Him who went about doing good. They said this should concern all men of all conditions. Further, all Christians should do this: “While we have time let us do good to all men?” Will not future happiness be increased by increasing doing good now?<sup>338</sup> They continued with scriptural admonitions. They asked if there was any ability to be happy hereafter if one has not, according to one’s power, fed the hungry, and visited those that are sick and in prison. The Holy Club knew and preached the judgment of God coming to the individual. These actions must also be linked for the purpose of saving a person’s soul from death.<sup>339</sup> Here is the true reason, established by God, for all works of charity. It demonstrates a maturity in the Holy Club in that they understood that purposes must be pure. They saw that God loves and wants above all that people be saved. Therefore they realized that doing good to people physically and emotionally must be linked to the true cause of God: another presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The quote from the Holy Club is particularly relevant, “and made all these actions subservient to a higher purpose, even the saving of souls from death?”<sup>340</sup> They quote that remarkable scripture, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”<sup>341</sup> Again these young men did not attempt to discredit the plain reading of the text but accepted it and tried to apply the scripture to life in their day and culture. This scripture was a direct course of action to “you must love your neighbor.”

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<sup>337</sup> Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Smith, 1792), 55-57. These questions took up several pages and none were answered to the negative.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, This is in reference to the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46.

The second set of questions for their defense against those contrary to visiting prisoners was more to the point of saving their souls.<sup>342</sup> The first question of this set asked if it were not appropriate to do good to our acquaintances considering point one, which focused on scripture. Good was then defined as convincing their acquaintances of the necessity of being Christians.<sup>343</sup> They also wondered if it was subsequently necessary for their acquaintances to become scholars and thereby affect their learning and virtue through method and industry. The Holy Club demonstrated to the Oxford scholars that these outsiders were being guided to a holy standard of living through the approved means of grace of the Church of England. To increase this perception, it was asked whether they should continue to guide them to constant communion, to religious books, and to making resolutions based on what they had read in these books recommended by the Holy Club.<sup>344</sup> Most of these people in prison had no formal education and most were illiterate but the point is well done by the Holy Club: increase in knowledge.

The third is concerned with the bodily needs of the hungry, naked, and sick. Is it appropriate or not to give to those who have such needs?<sup>345</sup> The questions again went to the point of the true reason for service. “Whether we may not give them, if they can read, a Bible, Common-Prayer Book, or *The Whole Duty of Man*?”<sup>346</sup> This question set then went back and forth between: have they understood these books, to clothing the children, and back to teaching them how to read, and the catechism with prayers for morning and evening. They interwove the gospel, dedication and service to God, and supplying

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<sup>342</sup> Coke, 56.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 57.

physical needs admirably. The Holy Club's purpose in loving people by caring for their distresses had to do with that love that God sent in His Son.

The final and fourth set of questions that the Holy Club proposed to discuss with those that despised their good works and godly manner of church attendance had to do with those in prison. "Whether...we may not try to do good to those that are in prison?"<sup>347</sup> The questions also dealt with the giving of small sums of money for release or tools of trade and material for said prisoners. What about clothes or medicine? What about supplying to the serious, a Bible or *The Whole Duty of Man*? They closed this section with the question whether they should guide them to public and private prayer and the taking of the Sacrament. The Holy Club's consistent purpose was to bring the people, whether poor, hungry, naked, sick, or in prison, to a closer and more dedicated communication with other Christians and the Lord. The Oxford community did not reply negatively. The Holy Club had a set of questions they employed for themselves in order to test their works and motives as well as to improve the quality and quantity of service to others. One was "Have I embraced every probable opportunity of doing good, and of preventing, removing, or lessening evil?"<sup>348</sup> They saw something that the other students at Oxford did not yet understand. God truly loved those cast-off. He did not have a higher sense of propriety for the educated than the illiterate, nor greater care for the wealthy and healthy than the poor and sick.

Wesley's reason for caring and service for others was due to his prime purpose in life, which was attempting to achieve holiness. This is what made the Lord pleased, in his mind. In his letter to his father in denying the opportunity of putting himself forward for

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<sup>347</sup> Coke, 57.

<sup>348</sup> John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* vol.1 (Boston: Hill & Brodhead, 1846), 285.

the pastorate at Epworth, Wesley listed the many places of service to people at Oxford. This gave him greater potential to grow in holiness, to his then deficient understanding of salvation. He had a salvation of faith and works at that point. The work before him was mind numbing but he only saw it as a way to become more holy. The list of endless needs in all its forms included: “poor families to be relieved; here are children to be educated; here are work-houses wherein both young and old want, and gladly receive the word of exhortation; here are prisons to be visited, wherein alone is a complication of all human wants; and lastly, here are the schools of the prophets; here are tender minds to be formed and strengthened, and babes in Christ to be instructed, and perfected in all useful learning.”<sup>349</sup>

One of the first two friends of Charles Wesley that constituted the Methodists before John Wesley joined them was William Morgan. William excelled in works of charity in giving and caring for children and those who had no power to care for themselves.<sup>350</sup> He started the group’s activity at the prisons and work houses. Some, each week, talked to young students, visited the prisons, taught poor families, cared for a parish work-house, and gave alms.<sup>351</sup> They rescued those they could from debt prison, had services at the prison two or three times weekly, set up a school for children, visited the poor weekly, cared for children in particular. In a few words, this group of young men responded to every suffering or lack of people before them that they could. If they were unable to aid, they shared life as they could.

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<sup>349</sup> Whitehead, vol. 1, 293.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 305.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 305-306.

Time with God during this service to people increased. They even went to all night services later.<sup>352</sup> These were instituted to be monthly but then became quarterly.<sup>353</sup> These were instituted after the Holy Club but demonstrate the practice of worship and prayer as being critical to the work of serving others. The Holy Club took of their time to serve people but only did this as they increased in prayer and fellowship with God. These men were circumspect and discussed any move they made and why. When William Morgan started visiting the prisons to give inmates religious instruction and doing the same for the poor and the sick, the Holy Club's response was consideration. This committee's purpose was to actively seek the will of the Lord and therefore they found that extensive council was required. They sought it from Samuel Wesley, Senior, and from the local secular and religious authorities. With their approval, they proceeded in prayer and activity, which always included religious instruction.<sup>354</sup>

Their charity to the poor was limited only by what they had available. Wesley dreaded spending anything on self when it could have been more properly spent on the poor. It was the Holy Club's practice to give away all they had except for providing for their own necessities.<sup>355</sup> Wesley and those with him never gave off caring for the poor in many ways. Wesley built from what a few could do to dispensing medicine, providing cheap publications of religious material, building schools for the education of children,

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<sup>352</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 256.

<sup>353</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* vol. 1 (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2003), 333.

<sup>354</sup> Richard Watson, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley* (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Episcopal Church, 1855), 23.

<sup>355</sup> Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. 1, 71.

promoting day schools and Sunday schools, and constantly providing for whatever need was in front of them.<sup>356</sup>

The Holy Club was the start of a great reformation that took from the universities, colleges, and books the gospel of salvation of Jesus Christ. This word was powered by the Holy Spirit but it was through people who loved God and humanity because they loved God. Therefore, no giving was enough, no suffering was deemed not worth the effort, no self-denial was counted, and no opposition was not loved and cared for. This Holy Club set a standard of a community of people dedicated to one another and to charitable giving combined with the gospel of a loving God that transformed the lives of the members of the Holy Club. That transformation affected others that came into contact with them. This reformation of the known gospel, buried in schools, became the known gospel alive in the poor. The Holy Clubs greatest effect was on the poor as the reformation turned toward revival.

Turning to a conclusion of this work, it is remarkable that this effort by these members produced no results of salvation for themselves. The gospel of the Lord has to do with belief but not belief that is defended through effort. Those who believe are received. There were yet more instructions that must be accepted for them to receive that salvation which was freely given in the Christ. This is dealt with in the concluding chapter as it seems critical to round out the story of this journey that led to their start toward sanctification and service that transformed the world.

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<sup>356</sup> George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism: Wesley and His Times* part 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859), 687.

## CHAPTER 9

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONCLUSION

The great works and attempts at holy living and perfection<sup>357</sup> were essential to the later strides of the Methodist movement and revivals that were associated with it. John Wesley demanded and demonstrated a continued deliberate service of God and people in community.<sup>358</sup> Therefore the works, detailed in the previous chapters, followed John Wesley's life style and those ministers and associates of his that he was able to effect as long as he lived. This was not what brought Wesley into the light of Christ however. He continued with this style of life while ministering at Epworth and Wroote for three years<sup>359</sup> and in the New World<sup>360</sup> at Savannah and Frederica for two years in the colony of Georgia.<sup>361</sup> During his time in Georgia, Wesley came to the understanding of his own failure. On the trip back to England, during what most likely was an Atlantic hurricane, he again came to the realization that his faith could not stand up to the prospect of death.<sup>362</sup> Wesley understood his own lost condition. This well-known quote is revealing. "I went to America, to convert the Indians; but O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will

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<sup>357</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 9. Wesley's father, Samuel, Sr., saw his son's service to people as a means to attain as near as perfection as possible. A quote from that letter is rather noteworthy, "He by whom actions and intentions are weighed will both accept, esteem, and reward you."

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 12, 415. Wesley in a letter dated 30 November 1770, states, "I find no such sin as legality in the Bible: The very use of the term speaks as Antinomian. I defy all liberty, but liberty to love and serve God; and fear no bondage, but bondage to sin."

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 37.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 17. John speaks of Charles and himself going to Georgia, 14 October 1735, in order to save their own souls by living wholly for the glory of God.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 75. Two years and almost four months since I left my native country

<sup>362</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 74-75.

deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, ‘To die is gain!’”<sup>363</sup> He had not yet come to the result that God aims at in each of us: abandoning our own attempts and seeking Christ for our salvation alone. He still enumerated his way of life as being eminently in line with the gospel but understands his lack in the face of danger.<sup>364</sup> John Wesley did not discover this by himself or through divine miraculous intervention. It was through the conventional means of testimony of others. Here was a thirty-five year old priest of the Church of England, a scholar of the ancient languages, a teacher of Oxford, a minister for five years, including two years with the desire and attempt to minister to the heathens<sup>365</sup> and John Wesley was seeking Christ for salvation. His history demonstrates that when things got difficult Wesley would work and strive harder.

When preparing to board the ship bound for his only journey to Georgia or the Americas, he met the Moravians.<sup>366</sup> These were his fellow passengers and they testified to him of their experiences with God through faith in Christ. This testimony was both in word and action. These Germans impressed Wesley by their dedication to scripture,<sup>367</sup> their seriousness of behavior, their humility, their service of others with their statements that the servile work was “good for their proud hearts” and “their loving Savior had done more for them.”<sup>368</sup> The day after landing on American soil, Wesley met Mr.

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 43.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 100. It pleased God to give me twenty-six of the Moravians for companions.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 17. These even started to learn English to better communicate with Wesley who was studying German for the same reason.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 21-22. Wesley was most impressed by their peace in the face of possible death during storms at sea during the three month journey.

Spangenberg, a German pastor from Savannah, who challenged him, for what seems the first time, as to if he had considered the concept on whether he had assurance of salvation.<sup>369</sup> Wesley did not understand the question and only gave words for reply that had no substance in his heart.

This relationship with the Germans continued for the time Wesley was in the New World. His careful scrutiny and willingness to learn brought him into a new understanding of the gospel.<sup>370</sup> Spangenberg was a pastor to the Germans and thereby identifies them to us as Moravians as he was from Hernhuth and Count Zinzendorf.<sup>371</sup> Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg came under the influence of Zinzendorf about 1728.<sup>372</sup> Spangenberg became Wesley's friend in 1736 and worked with the Hernhuth community of Zinzendorf for many years, including thirty years in America. Six days after landing back in England from his missionary journey to save his own soul and that of the Indians; John Wesley met Peter Boehler and two others from Hernhuth.<sup>373</sup> It seems the Lord God of all creation was after John Wesley. Wesley then offered to find them lodging and spoke with them whenever he could while in London. He could not understand what Boehler spoke of and least of all when he told Wesley, "that philosophy of yours must be purged away."<sup>374</sup> Wesley in his normal approach to conviction decided to renew and

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<sup>369</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 23. He surprised Wesley who did not know what to answer to the following questions: "Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?"

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 30. Wesley came to a theological division with the Moravians later but always appreciated the guidance they gave him during this time in his journey toward God.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 24. He impressed Wesley as Wesley recorded this of Spangenberg's response as to where he was going next: "What God will do with me I know not. I am blind. I am a child. My Father knows; and I am ready to go wherever He calls."

<sup>372</sup> *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, 781.

<sup>373</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 84. His comment in his journal about this is noteworthy, "A day much to be remembered."

<sup>374</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 85.

wrote down (which was also his normal behavior) his former resolutions. These were the normal attempts to please God by speaking openly, working hard, shunning laughter, speaking only that which glories God and do that which is only for God, turning from pleasure and praising God for all things.<sup>375</sup> Wesley was a near perfect example of a religion of works that is dominant in all the world religions.<sup>376</sup> On Sunday, 5 March 1738, Wesley was finally convinced by Peter Boehler of his lack of faith and unbelief. Boehler convinced Wesley to “preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.” This Wesley began to do, calling it “this new doctrine.”<sup>377</sup> Meeting Boehler again on 22 April 1738 Wesley could not understand this being an instantaneous work where faith is received. Being confident in the scriptures during his whole life, he resorted to the book of Acts and “found scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions.”<sup>378</sup> He had only one question left. How may one assume God works the same today? He was then provided with people and their testimonies of instantaneous translations out of darkness into light, out of sin and fear into holiness and happiness. Wesley then gives up. “I could now only cry out, ‘Lord, help thou my unbelief.’”<sup>379</sup> This is the brief flow of what brought him to the conviction that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God; and that He would bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it.<sup>380</sup>

Characteristically, Wesley resolved and wrote down his resolutions. Interestingly,

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 86.

<sup>376</sup> *Eerdman's Handbook to the World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdman's Pub. Co., 1982), 95. A concise statement referring to one ancient religion but easily transferable to all: “The path of religious duty is not neglecting what ought to be done, and avoiding what ought not to be done.” This clearly describes John Wesley's attempts at holiness.

<sup>377</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 86.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 91.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 102.

here it became simplified and there were only two to transcribe: “1. By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up. 2. By adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him, as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.”<sup>381</sup>

Religion became a living reality to Wesley when he finally understood he did not have it. He was assured of the truth of this through the scriptures, personal testimonies of others, and the felt lack in his own heart. This brought him a few nights later to the small service in Aldersgate Street, London, on 24 May 1738. About a quarter before nine, while one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans and describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. He felt that he did trust Christ and Christ alone for his salvation.<sup>382</sup> The ground of the heart of John Wesley had been thoroughly plowed by his parents, his prayers, the scriptures, his constant religious reading and study, his pattern of living, his companionship and friends of like mind, his dedication to the church and the sacraments thereof, his service to others, his self-denial of things pleasant and even at times necessary, and he had spent his life seeking God through religion. None of these things provided the necessary time or season of planting the seed that was ever before him. The Moravians from the time he left for the New World until the time for harvest did plant, water, and nourish the seed of faith in Christ alone. The Moravians harvested this precious crop also. The question then arises: How were these so different then that which

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 1, 103.

the Quakers, the Puritans, and the Anglicans could provide?

The Moravians involved had experienced persecution since the time of their founder, John Hus, in the early fifteenth century.<sup>383</sup> They spread in the sixteenth century from Bohemia and Moravia into Poland, East Prussia, and Hungary. In 1722 some Moravians found refuge on the estates of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. They named their community, Hernhuth, *The Watch of the Lord*.<sup>384</sup> Zinzendorf had a sponsor at his baptism - Philip Jacob Spener,<sup>385</sup> the author of *Pia Desideria*, and initiator of the pietism movement within German Lutheranism.<sup>386</sup> At Halle University, Zinzendorf also sat under August Hermann Francke, the successor of Spener in the pietist movement in Germany. Obviously there was a strong influence of this reformation movement in Zinzendorf when he encouraged the Moravians to come to his estates.

The *Pia Desideria*, published in 1675, made six proposals to correct the conditions in the church. The first was that there should be more extensive use of the Word of God among us.<sup>387</sup> Spener knew that preaching was not enough. He said that diligent use of the Word of God...must be the chief means for reforming something. If we succeed in getting the people to seek eagerly and diligently in the book of life for their joy, their spiritual life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become altogether different people.<sup>388</sup> The second proposal was the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood of all believers.<sup>389</sup> He called it a trick of the cursed devil that

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<sup>383</sup> *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, 572. *Unitas Fratrum*, *Unity of Brethren*, is the official name of the Moravians. They emphasized scripture; known by some as the first Protestants.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>385</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1964), 24.

<sup>386</sup> *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, 659.

<sup>387</sup> Spener, 87.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

spiritual things were reserved for the clergy. The third was that the people must have impressed upon them that the Christian faith is a thing of practice, not just knowledge.<sup>390</sup> There must be the practice of love, one to another. The fourth is that one must beware of how they conduct themselves in religious controversies as to not disannul love.<sup>391</sup> Spener had observed that many clergy were ill equipped to pastor, having not the Spirit of God. The fifth proposal was ministers should be true Christians and have divine wisdom to guide others in the way.<sup>392</sup> He quotes Dr. John Gerhard, from a book published in Latin in 1652, *Harmoniae Evangelistarum*. “Those who are wanting in love of Christ and who neglect the practice of piety do not obtain the fuller knowledge of Christ and more abundant gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence to obtain a genuine, living, active, and salutary knowledge of divine things it is not enough to read and search the scriptures, but it is necessary that love of Christ be added, that is, that one beware of sins against conscience, by which an obstacle is raised against the Holy Spirit, and that one earnestly cultivate piety.”<sup>393</sup> His sixth proposal was that sermons should be prepared so that their purpose of faith and fruits may be achieved in the hearers to the greatest possible degree.<sup>394</sup> The pulpit is not a place to demonstrate the skill of the preacher but rather to preach the Word of God, plainly and powerfully.

Zinzendorf had a divergent group of nationalities in the refugees under one banner come onto his estates. He could see no way to unify these, so he started with prayer meetings. He also encouraged them to seek out and emphasize the points in which they

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<sup>390</sup> Spener, 95-96.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

agreed.<sup>395</sup> In addition they had to enter into a solemn covenant with him, and to each other, to dedicate their lives, as Zinzendorf had his, to the service of Jesus Christ, each in their own calling and position. The Moravian revival, which reached its climax on 13 August 1727, was preceded and followed by the most extraordinary prayer.<sup>396</sup> On that day, the people of the congregation at Hernhuth were all dissatisfied with themselves as they gathered for communion. They had quit judging each other because they had become convinced, each one, of his lack of worth in the sight of God and each felt himself at this communion to be in view of the noble countenance of the Savior.<sup>397</sup> Zinzendorf says there was a sense of the nearness of Christ bestowed in a single moment, upon all the members that were present. During the first three decades following this modern Pentecost, the Moravians carried the Gospel of Salvation by the blood of the lamb to nearly every country in Europe but also to the Americas, Asia, and Africa.<sup>398</sup> This revival, sent by God, was just a little over eight years before this message of hope was brought to John and Charles Wesley by these Moravians. This was the fire of impassioned and joyful salvation that reached the heart of these churchmen.

Wesley had religion and morality before Aldersgate and added relationship with God after Aldersgate. John Wesley reformed his life before the revival of God's image within his heart, and God reformed the world as Wesley and his associates preached salvation through faith. The people of the Holy Club reformed themselves and God revived them. They then reformed to meet the guidance of the One who loved them for

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<sup>395</sup> John Greenfield, *Power from on High, The Story of the Great Moravian Revival of 1727* (Winston-Salem, NC: The Moravian Church in America, 1928), 22.

<sup>396</sup> Greenfield, 23.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 14.

themselves. This does have biblical precedence in the story of Cornelius (Acts 10:4-5). The angel told Cornelius that his prayers and acts of charity had come up as a memorial before God and that he should send someone for Peter to know what to do. This is a clear demonstration of the God who judges our every motive and thought. The Moravians had spent more than two years guiding John Wesley before he could receive that message of faith that was always before him from the scripture. Yet, he lived a religious life dedicated to God and the service of people. This is proper and good but insufficient as it does not line up with salvation by believing in the only begotten Son of God. It was this sin of unbelief that had kept John Wesley from salvation and joy of the presence of God. Many in every generation serve the church without the knowledge of a living, real relationship with God. Even Wesley had to hear the testimony of others who had experienced this in order to believe. The element most missing from the church today is that doctrine which was the focus of the Methodist revival: assurance of salvation.

John Wesley in a letter to his brother, Charles, dated 31 July 1747 writes, “Some years ago we heard nothing of justifying faith, or a sense of pardon; so that when we did hear of them, the theme was quite new to us.”<sup>399</sup> Charles spoke the same concern as he was nearing his salvation just a few days before John.<sup>400</sup> Charles was on the journey to the New World with John, Benjamin Ingham, and Charles Delamotte. All four came under the influence of the Moravians on board the *Simmonds*.<sup>401</sup> Charles found much

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<sup>399</sup> Wesley, vol. 12, 112.

<sup>400</sup> *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, vol. 1 (Staffordshire, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 88. Charles is astonished that he should ever think this a new doctrine: justification by faith alone. The plain reading of this section of the journal indicates that he did exactly that and was amazed that his church, and himself, had turned away from the grace of Christ unto another gospel.

<sup>401</sup> Wesley, vol. 1, 17. These departed England 21 October 1735 and set foot on American ground on 6 February 1736 (vol. 1, 23).

opposition to his strictness<sup>402</sup> in Georgia and left within a year.<sup>403</sup> During the long voyage back to England, with a detour for ship repairs to Boston,<sup>404</sup> Charles found that he had hope overcoming fear, which he rejoiced over and relayed hope to others of the benefits of a religious life.<sup>405</sup> Here Charles rejoiced in the feelings of hope and assumed it had to do with a life of dedication to God. He was short of the knowledge and belief that is required for salvation, though a priest of the Church of England. Shortly after landing in England, Count Zinzendorf arrived from Germany and called for him.<sup>406</sup> He spent some time with Zinzendorf discussing the state of religion.<sup>407</sup> When John returned from Georgia, Charles had met Peter Boehler and began to teach him English. This relationship also brought Boehler to the place of praying for this ill church-man and confronting Charles on his own salvation. Charles replied that his hope was placed on his best endeavors to serve God.<sup>408</sup> Still far from that gospel of Christ that relies on faith alone, though he had felt the presence of God giving him hope before this,<sup>409</sup> and knew the scriptures and had the dedication to serve God and people. Due to his illness, Charles resigned his Secretary position and did not return to Georgia.<sup>410</sup> He found the administrations of Peter Boehler in his prayers for him and guidance in theology to be of great relief. In these discussions, Charles again began to consider Boehler's doctrine of

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<sup>402</sup> *Charles Wesley*, vol. 1, 6-7. The journal makes it seem as a complete misunderstanding. He was also accused by a malicious person, Lawley, of forcing the people to prayer (vol. 1, 9). He was sent back to England by Oglethorpe, perhaps under disguised reasons but Charles had been repeatedly ill in this land of colonists, so the reasons may have been without rancor (vol. 1, 35, 38-39).

<sup>403</sup> *Charles Wesley*, vol. 1, 55. He landed in England on Friday, 3 December 1736.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 40.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 49-50.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 65.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 65, 67.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 82. Charles Wesley felt that he had nothing else to trust than his own efforts.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 49.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 84.

faith and to examine himself with the resolution to seek and long after it until he attained it.<sup>411</sup> Peter Boehler left and sent a Mr. Bray, a Moravian mechanic, who knew nothing except Christ. Boehler had left with Charles confessing his own unbelief and desire for forgiveness.<sup>412</sup> He met an older gentleman of great learning who by his tears, vehemence, and childlike simplicity showed Charles that he was near to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>413</sup>

This shows what an enormous change that was effected on Charles when he saw desire and faith to be the chief things of salvation. He says he longed on 14 May 1738 to find Christ, that he might show him to all humanity; that he might praise, that he might love him.<sup>414</sup> He spoke with two others in the days to follow, questioning them as to their certainty of Christ being within and found no certainty for self. In reading Luther's work on Galatians, he was astonished that he thought this doctrine of justification on faith alone was a new doctrine.<sup>415</sup> On Sunday, 21 May 1738, Charles prayed for the assurance of salvation again, trusting only in the word of God and his promises. He asked Jesus to come to him as he had promised and for the comforter whom he would send.<sup>416</sup> Another Moravian told him in his stupor of illness to arise and believe in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and you will be healed of all your infirmities.<sup>417</sup> Charles struggled and did say, "I believe, I believe!" He found himself convinced, not knowing how or when.<sup>418</sup> After

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 85. Charles exhorted another minister, Mr. Piers, to labor after the faith that he thought Charles had, but that Charles knew himself not to have.

<sup>412</sup> *Charles Wesley*, vol. 1, 86. Charles Wesley confessed in a confrontation with another that his hope was now on the assertion that, "I have not now the faith of the Gospel."

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 87.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 88-89. On the nineteenth he received the sacrament; but not Christ. Still his heart told him that he had not surrendered. Yet his hope was buoyed by the testimony of others.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 90. Here Charles finally relied upon God when he asked him to accomplish this in his own time and manner.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 91.

reading scripture, Charles found himself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. He saw that by faith he stood; by the continual support of faith, which kept him from falling.<sup>419</sup> He then interceded in prayer for his brother, confessing Jesus to be his Savior.<sup>420</sup>

The gift through Methodism, to the discussion of the church is the doctrine of assurance. “If it be true that the pulpit has lost its note of certainty and the pew the power of personal testimony, here is the remedy – the assurance of salvation. This experience is a privilege for which we should all strive, we need it. Methodism needs it. The universal Church needs it.”<sup>421</sup> How often we need to hear the effort of those who have gone before us. Their journey was not one of ease but of struggle such as we face today. The Holy Club members were dedicated to find Him who died for them. They made a deliberate decision to share what they had found with all as they served both the One and those He died to save.

The revival was continuous in England for many years while John Wesley lived. He spoke of the evidence of the revival and the work of God. It seemed to him that England was especially dealt with by the power of God. He saw many people converted. He witnessed rapid movement from convinced to convert in a few days. There was depth of conversion even to their conversation, clearness and boldness of the saved, and continuance of the revival for above eighteen years.<sup>422</sup> Wesley did not give his methods, but rather God, the reason for the revival’s continuance. He was willing to give credit where due to people, however. He thought that the revival was limited in Scotland and

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 92.

<sup>420</sup> *Charles Wesley*, vol. 1, 93.

<sup>421</sup> Arthur S. Yates, *The Doctrine of Assurance* (London: The Epworth Press, 1952), 221.

<sup>422</sup> *Wesley*, vol. 2, 335.

New England as the church leaders were full of pride, bitterness, bigotry, and self-indulgence. Self-denial was little taught or practiced. Wesley said, “No marvel then that the Spirit of God was grieved. Let us profit by their example.”<sup>423</sup> This revival did not continue and is not present today. It seems that Wesley’s fear that Methodism would degenerate into a mere sect, only distinguished by some opinions and modes of worship, has come to pass.<sup>424</sup> Methodism was a striving after the presence of God through means of self-denial in order to achieve the Lord’s will instead of the individual’s will. It is normal for revival to occur within individuals and thereby spread. Today is a good day to start. It is not appropriate to be overly concerned with people’s opinions as to whether you are being fanatical or merely outrageous. After Wesley had ministered for sixty years he still greatly feared that a people at ease would slip back and settle on their lees.<sup>425</sup> He strongly warned people of their laziness if they were not to five A.M. preaching and to shake off the indolence.<sup>426</sup>

The greatest challenges of the church today do not have to do with the problems around us but the problems or lack of something within the church. That which changed the church of the 1700s was the doctrine of assurance being consistently taught by people who had experienced God’s presence within themselves. It was the decision to be the church rather than believe only. These that followed the teaching of the early Methodists understood the time they were in and used their lives for the propagation of faith wherever they went. They continued in their discipline to serve God and people, with

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 336. Wesley saw the churchmen as wise in their own eyes and thus would not allow God to send those He chose. His use of the term bigot is a wide use referring to their own opinions and modes of worship.

<sup>424</sup> Wesley, vol. 4, 267.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 366.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 362.

God working with them. To be the church today requires no less of us that believe. We need to evaluate our success or failure according to factors that do justice to the kingdom of God as seen in the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus Christ rather than in numbers and church buildings.<sup>427</sup>

The people of the “Holy Club” were brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This being so: their faith, their energy, their prayers, their work, and their cheerfully endured sufferings resulted in one of the most glorious revivals of the work of God recorded in the Christian Church.<sup>428</sup> Should we not hope that what God did through these of the “Holy Club,” He will do through those who strive as they did?

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<sup>427</sup> George Barna, *The State of the Church: 2005* (Ventura, CA: The Barna Group, 2005), 52.

<sup>428</sup> Rev. L. Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publication, 2003),

## AFTERWORD

This study has found worth in this writer's life, the make-up of the local churches which he serves, and has affected the relationship to the denomination of which he has been affiliated for twelve years. As he has been affected by this three year reading of revival, reformation, the reformers, and in particular the Holy Club; all the areas surrounding him have also been influenced. Yet, this work has centered on just a few years of the beginnings of the revival that shook the world and brought into the light the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through the efforts of a few. This is clear that God will do as He wills with few or many. In the case of the Holy Club, this writer has learned that to accept the standard for a stricter and more observant religion, regardless how carefully discussed and prayed over, will result in disagreements with others who do not take as deliberate a stand. There will and has been division through growing in service to God and people. It is a wonder that this occurs within a fellowship over issues of service and doing good but it always has. Any movement that is austere or more intense causes others to see this as too severe, legalistic, and perhaps eccentric. Being "rigid" is viewed as sinful in some of today's denominations. This is being applied to plain, biblical, and historically tested doctrines. The current result and application of this study of the action and thought of the Holy Club which resulted in service to people because of Christ, and for the opportunity to do the greater good of presenting the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus is seen as particularly onerous. Acceptable to some denominations that have been historically Christian is to serve for the pure purpose of loving others and not to speak of Christ.

Hurricane Katrina roared through Louisiana and was soon followed by Hurricane Rita during parts of this study. These two storms devastated the entire Gulf of Mexico coastline of Louisiana and Mississippi and drove hundreds of thousands of people inland for what turned into a permanent move for a third of those displaced. The churches I serve are two hundred miles north of the coast. The town, motels, local campgrounds, trailer parks, and hastily set up shelters were filled from Katrina refugees as those from Rita came in. All homes for sale that I heard of were sold within two weeks and all rentals were filled within days. This was the case for all of Louisiana, eastern Texas, Mississippi, southern Arkansas, and further as places were found. I found situations and help as far as New Mexico and Pennsylvania to send people to. The churches responded immediately to the needs of the people they found. The response was in mass and cooperation with only the purpose of aiding those in need, without regard for their own concerns of loss or possible gain in people or resources in general.

Initially, at the churches I serve, we gathered food for a local children's home that had overnight acquired fifty plus extra children lost from their parents in New Orleans, along with as many adults they could safely house. This was necessary as most of Mississippi was without power for days when Hurricane Katrina went up its center, and the children's home could get no food from their distributor in Jackson, MS. That distributor also lost a third of their trucks in New Orleans and Mississippi. Thus we found ourselves the main supplier of food for about two hundred for three days, and this took all our time. The Holy Club members were the ones to do the work and not seek position, but rather sought service to people in face to face encounters where they could also do the greater good of presenting Christ and true religion. Ministers working and serving was

odd then, much more acceptable today, but just as scarce. This writer was on the road with truck and trailer to get food and supplies. Not all that was needed could be purchased locally because distribution was greatly affected. Supermarkets scrambled for more supplies without success for the first two weeks. This was alleviated once Jackson, MS restored their power lines.

The local town had two shelters which we then went into with prayer, tracts, and helps as we could. Soon we were providing transportation to other geographical areas where work was available. It became obvious that the next need was setting up more permanent homes as it was gradually becoming apparent that many had nothing to go back to. Communication and seeking loved ones was difficult for months. Another pastor and I became the ones setting up apartments, fixing abandoned homes, and old house trailers where we could. As soon as one was cared for, another was waiting. This information is to bring up the point that I was getting stressed, tired, empty, and hurt. Coupled with the continuing pastoral duties, within six weeks I could feel myself not quite up to the ability to continue. It would distress me if I received another contribution for the refugees as this would entail an appropriate spending of the funds. Through local contributions and friends nationwide, I had spent close to \$12,000 myself on used furniture, supplies, bus tickets, plane tickets, gasoline for those who had rescued vehicles, and other needs for local refugees, all hands-on. Another \$5000 was directly sent to a church that had the possibility of re-opening in New Orleans and since has done so.

Then this study became very alive and I put to use what I was learning. I saw that I had a choice and instead of taking a vacation, I started preaching daily at six in the morning. Wesley had his daily preaching at five in the morning for fifty plus years but I

could not get anyone to come to services that early in the day. These early morning meetings gave me the energy to keep going forward with joy and hope. Somehow, our Lord blessed us through these services and kept us moving toward the goal of service to those without power, the poor, the sick, and the hopeless. These services restored our lines of power for the continued proclamation of salvation through Christ.

The six A.M. service, lasting about a year and four months at the time of this writing, continues but has been reduced to six days a week. This has caused a stir in the community and interest, but not as great as expected. The greater effect has been individually for those who attend, as we come to an acute awareness of our insufficiency and therefore need of the sacrifice of Jesus. This daily service had been a revelation from the writings of the time of the Holy Club, with most of the specific application from John Wesley. I have found no one today who has heard of them in another location or time. Most Roman Catholic churches have discarded their daily masses years ago in this area. The Methodist ministers I sought for advice, only saw this comically and without thought. Thus I have had to rely on the writings from the Holy Club era for format and realized the value of a time of open sharing and testifying in all small group situations from the many testimonies recorded by Wesley.

The pattern of a meeting follows the basics gleaned during this study. We open with a hymn that may have music back-up or not (depending on who shows up), public prayer conducted by the speaker (usually me), a sermon of about twenty minutes spoken extemporaneously, and then we open for prayer requests, testimonies, and sharing about how the previous day has been. We close with group prayer by all and a hymn of praise to God. In the closing prayer, I normally take the lead by being quiet and allowing others,

if not almost demanding of others, their participation. These others have learned to lead and also allow expression for each. Some services have lasted forty-five minutes and others three hours. I continually seek others for the preaching with little success but the daily reading and study enforced through the methods of the Holy Club leaves me no lack of material but rather the normal quest of all pastors as to what would be best to continue the process of sanctification and save souls today.

This has been an opportunity to bring in the concept of seeking holiness through sharing of ones own failures recently. This is an application of the sharing to each other of the members of the Holy Club, where they laid bare themselves in order to seek holiness. I am the most personally revealing as yet in order to encourage others and for my own growth. The results have been astonishing as people are speaking out about their personal walk with God through Jesus. Some have never before spoken in group sessions or testified to the presence of the Spirit in their lives. Their testimonies to this have frequently been with tears. A father has been bringing his autistic step-daughter. Her change in the last year has been more growth than her parents have seen in twenty years. She now almost looks you in the eye and she comes to most people instead of hiding. Consistently, the dozen people normally attending have testified of this one service as attributing to growth in the presence and love of the Lord in their lives. It has been a source of testimony to others and an awareness of greater dedication needed by those who hear. I have been told that it is a waste of time working with so few but the personal development for me and all participants has been worth the energy, time, and conflict.

The congregational interest has been enough that I am planning an evening service, based on Wesley's seven in the evening daily service. These two services, two

hundred and fifty years ago, were made at times so as not to interfere with work or duties of those wishing to attend or find a place to worship. Actually Wesley's purpose was to attend to the needs of those wishing to flee from the wrath to come; judgment. The morning service has been possible as people who have attended have been gradually able and willing to step up to leadership when I have been unavailable. There have also been other ministers in the area whom I have called on to participate, giving them warning that they may come to join in before leading. This will also be the case for the evening service, but the time and duration may vary according to the needs of initially available people. These will be the guidance for the time of the services starting in April but they will change as life normally does. Some have requested a daily service not at six in the morning. We will watch for God's blessing as we serve opportunities for others to come to greater faith.

These services have been a gift but this is due to the increased understanding of the Holy Club's methods of how to serve. Due to personal application of private prayer, Bible reading and study, and a renewed vitality about the Lord's Supper the morning services are with energy and have plenty of information to be shared and received. The Holy Club's method of focus on the means of grace found fertile soil in my heart. A modern interpretation of this data leaves the clergy as a part of the laity. This is found in particular with the hands on service and witnessing of the members of the Holy Club to the non-churched public. The opposing concept places the clergy separate from the laity in leadership positions, which does not line up with the activity of these high churchmen of the Holy Club.

The means of grace was also new information. Prior to and since salvation, thirty plus years past, this writer has known of the value of fellowship, prayer, scripture, and communion, but has never heard of an organized method that dealt with an interwoven application of all four. This interwoven application then demands a result of increase in all with an accompanying service to people. The consequences that cause an increase of service to people should be due to the increase of the presence of God. If there is no increase, then one must seek harder and openly seek advice of others. The focus toward these “means of grace” and with that particular name has helped turn this writer more toward duty and love rather than a vague service which has been rather ad hoc and mystical.

The determination to no longer waste time is a blessing of these readings. It is obvious to serve as one knows to read scripture, but little is it understood the standard that was self imposed by the Holy Club that thereby resulted in revival through God’s grace. The church has been content with too little and does not have a higher standard of service. Here is a standard that is beyond our abilities but all for the glory and through the power of God. These means of grace are now a discovered method whereby one, in a group, may actively find growth in the presence of God. That which is particularly biblical to hearing is that the size of the group is of no concern but rather the purpose and intensity of the seekers. This has also revealed in the opposition personally incurred as normal. The study of the Holy Club has increased, according to opponents, a detrimental characteristic of courage of convictions. The growth in love of the scriptures and defense of them through the logic of John Wesley has demonstrated to opponents how unbending this writer is.

This writer is now unacceptable within his current denomination but understands their resistance from the readings of the Holy Club. None will walk in peace with the world if they are seeking holiness with all their heart. None of this should apply to the feeble attempts modern Christians make, and yet the focus on revival and seeking God, whether successful or not, is equally offensive to the religious. There has been a decided movement of determining that this writer is judging others, but in fact is understanding the inner fears of personal procrastination that feels like not enough is accomplished. This is a revealed lack of faith and love of the Lord within. Thus there is agreement with their judgment but for different reasons. One is not worthy but must decide to trust Christ and Him alone for salvation and growth. To this end we work and guide others through the means of grace without trusting in them but constantly seeking the renewal of when He touches us. These times of refreshing are what we are diligently working for in service to Him and to others that they may also receive what we have found.

The denominational approach today seems to be more toward a non-confrontational, non-theological standard of loving because of Christ without regard to issues that may cause discomfort. This work with the Holy Club has revealed the opposite plan to be of great worth. Take all problems into dialogue and find whether they biblical or not, and then decide how to implement them into ones life if they are. Here, they found the presence of God through ignoring the honor or disrespect that comes from people. It was not smooth sailing but God did guide and bless their work toward their salvation and that of others.

This study has initiated a greater emphasis on prayer of all sorts in public and private. It has been a growing source of teaching from the pulpit and in private

conversations with those who can hear and to those who will not. We have doubled our prayer meetings at the church since this study has started and have involved more personal conversations toward individual growth.

The Holy Club's focus on the poor has brought to the church's attention the plight of so many Spanish speaking people within our area that the next project is to learn this valuable language. During the refugee situation, this writer had an interpreter whenever there was the need. They are relatively available in the church but not enough that it would not have been and will be useful to have the language individually to explain salvation and more to the point, of what religion is not and what true religion is. This teaching of the Holy Club has been especially instructional in working with the illiterate, as most of the immigrants are, in this area. Actually this area of Louisiana has a normal population with twenty-five percent illiterate and this simple teaching has been surprising for many as people move around the community. The simple statement of explaining what religion is not has helped many. Again, this was found through the study of Wesley that had not done before this project.

These methods of seeking with intensity within community have restored the hope of revival and direction for continued service to those without the church and without hope. The means of grace have become normal conversation within the congregation and these are having an effect to turn more toward an active love of God and people because of Him. Hopefully congregational growth in grace will continue and prove more fruitful as we are able to incorporate more of this study into fellowship with love and patience, through the grace of God.

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## VITA

Ross Genger, born on September 19, 1947 in western Pennsylvania, is a United Methodist minister having served churches in south and north Louisiana. He has an Electrical and Electronic Technology degree from Pennsylvania State University, a Bachelor of Science with a major in biology from Westminster College in Pennsylvania, a Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a Doctor of Ministry in Reformation and Revival of the Congregation from Gordon-Conwell, and has completed an apprenticeship in electrical construction from south Florida. The Doctor of Ministry program initiated in 2003, completed in 2007, was focused on the Holy Club and the means of grace of the Great Awakening of the 1700s. He has worked extensively in electronic and electrical construction and maintenance throughout the gulf coast, on-land, and off-shore in electronics, heavy industry, and oil field related areas. He taught high school two years for the United States Peace Corps in Malaysia and participated in Bible-smuggling into various closed countries. He is a seeker of God through Jesus who will never be satisfied until he is translated or dead. He's the husband of one, father of two, grandfather of two who currently has two indoor pets and numerous outdoor dependents including cats, squirrels, and birds.